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30° from the Northern Tropic: Art, region and collective practices from urban Latin American and Arab worlds

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the socially imagined representation of two areas of the global South, through the lens of contemporary art. It traces the historicisation of urban Latin America and the Arab world along a timeline of critical lenses, questioning their construction as imagined sites. Re-occurring tropes from exhibition spaces acting as representations of the global South on a macro-level are contrasted with observations from a local level, in an ethnographic study of nineteen artist groups of four capital cities of Latin America and the Arab world. The research draws upon sociological methodologies of research, arts methodologies and historicisation to chart the scope and function of these groups against the backdrop of the global art-institution's so-called geographic turn and its romanticisation of the precarious state as the new avant-garde. Moving away from the traditional cartography of art and social history, this thesis offers an expanded concept of collectivity and social engagement through art, and the artist group as unit of social analysis in urban space. Putting these ideas into dialogue, artist-led structures are presented as counter-point to collective exhibitions and to the collectivity of national identity and citizenship. An abundance of artist groups in the art scene of each city represents an informal infrastructure in which a mirror image of inner-workings of the city and art world become visible through this zone of discourses in conflict. This unorthodox exploration of art, region, and collective expression launches into the possibility of new constellations of meaning, tools to recapture the particulars of everyday experience in the unfolding of large narratives. Examining the place of collective art practices in the socio-political history of the city, this intervention into current theory around the role of art from the global South traces the currents and counter-currents of the art-institution and its structures of representation re-enacted in places of display and public discourse -- the museum, the news, the gallery, the biennial, the street and the independent art space.

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Introduction

Think of the sky
And meditate on the absence of center or limit.
Think of the sun and moon
And meditate on light without shadow.

Jetsun Milarepa, c.1100, The Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa.

This thesis is an investigation into the construction of the so-called global South, not as a geographic place, but as a conceptual place that exists outside the mappings of the physical world. It imagines a world not dictated by the dualities of centres and peripheries, spotlights and shadows, as did Milarepa several centuries ago. It proposes a shift in the established systems for viewing, interpreting and representing art and region, an invitation to cross boundaries along new pathways, a search for knowledges unmitigated by the sensationalism of global media. Art and collective practices from San Salvador, Mexico City, Cairo and Beirut – four capital cities of the South – are the protagonists in this project of interrogating territorialisation. Each is a city that exists in the zone within thirty degrees of the Northern Tropic meridian, each embodies the contradiction of geographic logic, located in the Northern part of a place designated as the South. Read as case studies in a dialogue about strategies, infrastructures, and methodologies, they present an untraditional constellation of real places through which to view an overlaying of the conceptual map of the South, and the concepts of Latin America and the Arab world.

The evidence presented in this thesis includes library research in archives and libraries of seven countries, oral history collection, and gathering of qualitative, ethnographic data, through sociological methods. The analysis of this evidence draws from art theories and methodologies as well as from sociological theory regarding art, image and society.

Together, these question the idea of a global South that is being inscribed as historical truism, the mechanisms and devices that propose to define and create this place as a site within the global contemporary art world.

While art from the South is undoubtedly growing exponentially in presence and popularity in the main formats for artistic representation and production (from biennials to academic texts) it is increasingly limited by a Eurocentric art institution and its interpellating system, as it continuously seeks to peripheralize that which becomes more and more visible on the world stage of art. There is also still a great lack of published studies outside this framework that examine collective practices, urbanity and art from the South. That is to say, the telling of world history and art history still over-represents the North and ignores the lived realities in a large part of the world outside this North. The same phenomenon holds true when we track the Souths within the North and the Norths within the South.

The first part of this thesis examines the trajectory of art from the Global South as it has moved through history from the new world to the third world to the label of the global South; from a position of marginalized outsider to the centre of the art-institution's most sought after commodity (the new avant-garde in the 21st century). How did this happen? What parts of the South and its aesthetics are outside, hidden from, or even in opposition to the large narratives about the South being classified and commodified through a multi-billion industry still controlled by a Euro-centric system?

Chapters 1 through 4 explore the processes of these currents and counter-currents in recent exhibition history, though looking first at the recent history of the critical lens for viewing/understanding art from the South and its place in history, the dominant curatorial narratives and exhibition formats that have been used to incorporate art from the South into a Northern art world. This includes a charting of the critical spaces of art-making in the global South since end of the age of colonization, from the religious institution to the space of the internet (including the artist studio, the fine arts academy, early international

press, the artist group, the state institution/collection, the gallery, the exhibition, the political movement, the streets, the wilderness, the ruins, the internet and the other virtual networks). With the art world's expansion from the centre on outwards to the peripheries, it examines the so-called geographic turn in contemporary art, and the relationship of this process to ideas of coloniality and institutional multiculturalism. It explores small narratives about region and city histories that are encased in artworks and art actions, and the transformation of these micro-narratives when they are placed on the large stages of the Venice Biennial, Documenta, and other major exhibitions.

The last two chapters of this thesis contrast the large narratives of exhibitions and historical lenses with an unconventional grouping of case studies of four real geographic locations. It reveals shortcomings and discrepancies between the large and small narratives of this imagined public sphere of the South. The case studies focus on a selection of artist groups working on long-term projects with a social or participatory element, active in each city between 2009 and 2012, and identified as key players in the local scene in each place (identified through interviews and field research with artists, both underground and internationally known, curators, museum workers, gallerists, critics, historians, and other cultural workers in each site). An alternative narrative emerges from comparing the actions of artist groups working on a local level in four capital cities of the South with the critical history of art from this region and the gaze of the global art-institution.

Each chapter will contrast a macro-political history of the dynamics of the imagining of the South, placing those in dialogue with these four cities. The project is based upon some unconventional pairings, though it is not intended as a comparison, nor a dichotomous map of North and South. This project began as a study of Latin American art and developed in part out of frustration with the misconceptions of categorisations distorted by definitions translated through a Eurocentric art system of evaluation. This is a problem in art history and theory that is present throughout the South, even hundreds of years after the colonial period. Instead of comparing Latin American art and creators to

Northern counterparts (as is the norm in current art historical and theoretical practices) I pivot the gaze to another South, and turn to examples of art and artist groups from the so-called Arab world, a region not so different from the imaginary of Latin America. This thesis is a proposal for a kind of South-South contextualisation around the kinds of collaborative and collective work that goes into the image-making of place, a proposal for a new conversation built from an uncommon constellation of points on the map. As a conceptual move outside popular binaries in so-called 'global' contemporary art, this thesis proposes dialogue around collective art-making in two cities from Latin America and two cities from the Arab world. It delves into the often co-dependant and contradictory relationships between institutions, artist groups and the state; and their roles in the collective representation of region and city.

On the urban street level of the global South, outside the walls of the local arts infrastructure, contemporary art does not look (or feel or sound) the way as it does within the white walls of a biennial gallery. A few scenes from this different vantage point of the city show a different art world: On their way to work on a gridlocked-traffic afternoon, city bus riders hear the forgotten sounds of a revolution that took place on the same street some forty years earlier. Inside city jails the incarcerated create live art through a collective marriage, questioning the history of patriarchy and the criminalization of poverty in their city. An abandoned downtown theatre becomes a centre for theorising Frantz Fanon through movement and performance, commemorating the city's artistic past. These are all scenes from twenty-first century artworks from the global South, culled from collective art practices that are concerned with an artistic and social significance. Sounds, images, and phrases from local history are constantly being re-inserted into contemporary life by artists working together on long-term urban interventions in Beirut, Cairo, Mexico City and San Salvador. Viewed as part of local genealogies and informal infrastructures, the history of artist groups embedded in the larger city and art world histories represents a dialectical counter-circuit, running both against and in tandem with the larger biennial circuit and the market-driven rhythms of the art-institution. The work of artist groups hints at blind-spots in urban collective

memories, critiquing cultural narratives born of popular media and political rhetoric. Artist groups have constructed art/activism during the past nine years through precarious conditions in the post-colonial city. Installing their headquarters in sites of crisis and post-industrial abandon, they work against the continual re-directing of artistic, economic and cultural flows back to the established centres, countering the processes of interpellation at work in the coloniality of power still griping the world system. Their actions reconvert the discourses of urban spaces; where artworks become vehicles for intervening in the public imaginary; and education becomes an artistic medium. This socially-engaged aesthetic, often mistaken for anything but art, merges contrasting worlds in a Benjaminian sense, as boundaries blur between art-space and capital city. How might an understanding of the strategies and methodologies behind this kind of aesthetic resistance speak to problems in the urban experience of cities around the world?

On several levels, this thesis examines the roles of artworks, artists and arts workers in the cultural representation of pan-ethnic regions, from micro-political everyday art processes to the macro-expressions of locality and territory found in international exhibitions. Themes of representation, occupation, dissidence, mestizaje, reconversion, and critical zones of colliding discourses are addressed in the six chapters of this thesis, as well as an appendix on each artist group that participated in the ethnographic study, and a proposal for an inter-regional exchange project.

Chapter 1

From Orientalism to *Pornomiseria*: Evolution of the critical lens looking South

There are many parallels in the critical lenses that have been used to understand the trajectories of how modern and contemporary art in Latin America and the Middle East North Africa,¹ simultaneously occurring with the processes of decolonialization, and especially in the ways these two regions have become historicized as spaces of representation. The following timeline traces the evolution of the use and application of critical lenses regarding art from the South, as this region moved from being classified as the post-colonial third world to the global South in process of decolonization. Since the 1980s, a radical shift in the telling of histories surrounding art from this region took place, an era of revisionist history that began symbolically with Edward Said's reinvention of meaning for the classical period of art once called Orientalism, his critique essentially turning the old definition on its head and revealing the false stereotypes upon which a so-called scientific discipline had been founded during the colonial period. Since then, the subsequent critical period of art history of the global South maintained its peripheral status, and from the margins critiquing the larger history of art, it sought to dispute the categorizations and definitions imposed upon it by the institution of art.

The series of lenses in this chapter focuses on the critical scholarship around art history of the South, that sought to carry out the dual tasks of re-writing the false assumptions of the Eurocentric gaze/perspective that had once conquered and categorized this region, while uncovering the small narratives (minor expressions) of a history that had been discarded, ignored and overwritten by the hegemonic large narratives (major expressions). This counter-history of interventions into hegemonic territory developed into several branches of counter-narratives, or a series of interventions into the larger idea of art history. In this sense, the following evolution of the critical lens for

¹ I refer to these as LA and MENA.

viewing/understanding art from the South can be conceptualised as a history of interventions into a system of representation that was born out of the old colonial design (and continues to reproduce itself as the system Anibal Quijano has identified as the coloniality of power). Three strands of this counter-history that are especially important to the development of the critical lens are as follows:

- The legitimization of artistic expression, vision and voice from the South as it developed from the moment of post-colonization to the present
- The recovery of documentation, study and promotion of art and theory from the South
- The reading (misreading) of aesthetics from the South into the symbolic and indexical, standing in for the region (instead of being regarded as expressions from the South, they have become conflated with the South)

These locuses of interaction, creativity, and aesthetic language can be traced through the critical debates regarding art, history, and territory have taken place in these spaces.²

Examining the presence and development of these spaces in two regions of the world (LA and MENA), this chapter focuses on a study of their structure revealing parallels, commonalities and points of convergences.³

These histories have not thus far not been told together as parallel counterparts. Existing outside the North/South or East/West binary that is largely regarded as defining art history, a South-South comparison does not yield the same validation as periphery/centre pairing. There is no translation into a higher market price in exchange for connecting canons of the South, no large museum project is at stake (as are the projects currently being driven through a validation of art from the South through its linking to a Northern canon or institution). The South-South lens (cultural, historical, art historical and economic) has, for the most part, become lost since the perceived failures of South-South ideological projects originating in the 1950s and 60s, like socialism, Pan-Americanism or Pan-Arabism. And yet now more than ever before in the history of art,

² These range from physical spaces to representational spaces -- schools, studios, newspapers, journals, manifestos, movements, artist groups, to name a few.

³ Focusing, as well, on the manner in which these two regions and their art forms have been historicized through the lens of criticality since the late 1980s, when art historians began to recover from the shadows histories of the modern in these two Souths.

the Northern art-institution is looking to the South for new artistic proposals, new art markets are being formed and new art cities are becoming cultural capitals, each with their own school of art thought. The rise of the South in the North since the 1980s provides a new set of circumstances through which to explore the history of two Souths like LA and MENA in triangulated conversation with a Northern history; through which to trace the presence of genealogies that connect art, politics, and transnational practices. Even as the artists of the South have become a strong presence in the desires of the art institution and market, and are perhaps on the brink of dominating the imagination of the art world centre, they have not been able to escape the label or the theoretical framework of the periphery. Instead, within the canonical writings of art history, art history of the global South has most often been historicized as art and culture that derive from a modernism believed to be native only to the North, stripped of any right to originality and cultural dialogue as an equal of European and Euro-American art.⁴ This trend of viewing modern and contemporary art of the South as evidence of the spread of Western hegemonic dominance has continued as a main narrative in art history and art theory, even despite the past forty years of scholarly work by historians who have documented the originality and global influence artists and art movements of the global South from pre-1980s.⁵

The following timeline of spaces and encounters between two Souths challenges this idea of centre/periphery and examines crucial yet overlooked elements in the telling of art and regional histories, particularly with regards to the way art developed differently outside of the North, the centrality of territory and time in navigating multiple art traditions, and the strategies artists employed to navigate both international and local socio-political

⁴ In "Originality, Universality, and Other Modernist Myths," Ming Tiampo writes, "Like the Tate Artist Timeline, the narrative constructed by Art Since 1900 (the discipline's most important recent pedagogical canon) acknowledges the internationalization of art production at the end of the twentieth century, but leaves modernism intact... Where the existence of modernism beyond the West is narrated, it is framed as proof of the West's hegemony." (p.167)

⁵ This persistence of the myths of an original modernism is present in the trope of the Southern artist as copyist whose only claim to originality is through a localised "authenticity". It is a problem compounded by the insistence of some curators and historians of the South who insist on claiming validation for their artists through connections and links to the North.

landscape (the latter of which is often mistold even in contemporary readings of art histories of the South).

Undoing History

The story of contemporary art must begin with modernism, as Oriana Baddeley and Valerie Fraser have demonstrated in one of the key English-language historic accounts of the relevance of Latin American art to the global art world. Their book *Drawing the Line: Art and Cultural Identity in Contemporary Latin America* (1989) signaled a paradigm shift in the conceptualizing of history of the South, as they were the first to bring up theory of alternative modernism (Craven, 1996, 41), with the following argument:

“...far from repudiating modernism the muralists, together with many other Latin American artists, have used modernism to their own ends, or have expropriated or subverted it to produce an alternative modernism better suited to a Latin American context. One of the recurring features of contemporary Latin American art is the way in which so many artists have experimented with the established categories and the subjects, forms and techniques of art not simply for the sake of novelty but as a part of a wider challenge to the dominant cultural traditions of Europe and North America.” (1989, 2-3⁶)

Writing in a time dominated by linear thinking that marginalized Latin America as a backwards third world not as advanced as the modern first world, Baddeley and Fraser’s work helped to shift the centre/periphery model to a concept of mutual exchange: in the larger story of modernism, Latin American artists played a central role as active agents, presenting a new theoretical frame in which cultural exchange occurred in both directions

⁶ In "The Latin American Origins of Alternative Modernism" (*Third Text*, 1996), American art historian David Craven credits Baddeley and Fraser’s insertion of the alternative modernism theme as an original contribution to the field of Latin American art studies, while suggesting the need for an alternative modernism proposal from Latin American post-colonial theorists (of which there have already been many from Ruben Darío to Marta Traba, many of whom are also cited by Baddeley and Fraser). While both are integral parts of the same argument, the importance of a critical European voice cannot be underestimated in this case; Baddeley and Fraser’s criticality works to undo the very dichotomy of N/S thinking that would otherwise predetermine theoretical perspectives according to their geographic location. Against a backdrop of uncritical European perspectives on Latin American art, the theoretical framework presented in *Drawing the Line* stands out as a key voice that found a pathway out of the blinding privilege of Eurocentrism.

between the South and North. They set a precedent for English-language texts and thinkers in the North, challenging those who come after them to engage more critically with Latin American art as a radical intervention into global art, and pushed the limited theories of the N/S binary to go beyond the normalized tropes of centre/periphery, original/copy, and theory-makers/image-makers.⁷

Baddeley and Fraser remind us that since the end of colonial times in the Americas, European and Indigenous art traditions were configured as opposite references for the modern visual languages Latin American artists would create over the next hundred years, though both heritages were often equally as foreign to the majority of artists from this time period, who were native born mestizos or second generation Europeans. This dichotomy continued to weigh in on the diversity of languages, spaces and representations of art and expression created in this third space over many generations of artists. These same questions of the creation of a third space in the face of marginalization that threatened visibility have also begun to be recovered in the modern history of Arab art by contemporaries of Baddeley and Fraser like Iraqi art historian Wijdan Ali, considered as an expert on the topic who has published and curated widely since the 1980s. The process of recovery of this history progressed more slowly than its Latin American counterpart, until the recent boom in Arab contemporary art that started in the early 2000s. In her 2012 introduction to an entry quoting a 1996 paper on the history of Modern Arab Art by Ibrahim Aloui, the author of the *100 Artist Blog* on Modern and Contemporary Art and Artists from the Arab World summarises the key introductory questions regarding the historicization of Arab art and its absence from the cannon of modern art history, even in the current boom moment of Arab art in the global contemporary cannon.

“Have you ever wondered about the art historical roots of the Arab world beyond classic Islamic art? ...strange that there is very little in the Western canon about Modernisms from the Arab

⁷ In their recounting of Latin American modern and contemporary art history, Baddeley and Fraser recognize Latin American artists as being at the centre of both art-making and theorizing about culture, against the backdrop of a common ground in “the shared history of colonial oppression, its twentieth-century legacy of continuing external interference and exploitation.” (ibid).

world, almost as if history stopped at the beginning of the twentieth century... It is a fact that Modernism did sweep through the Arab world, and in turn, laid the foundation for the Contemporary art we see today. (<https://100artistsdotorg.wordpress.com/2012/>)⁸

The dream of finding new art languages to express the modernity of the South as a place lodged between diverse geographic and temporal heritages and identities has been a central theme in both Arab modern art history and that of Latin America, this search only recently being uncovered and historicized through critical lenses for viewing art from the South. Since 1989 the number of historical accounts telling these stories have greatly increased, as have the narratives on the shaping of European identity and art through Orientalism and colonialism.⁹

After the postcolonial turn in art history, marked by the Orientalism of Edward Said, this recent historicization, the influence of the mythic figure of the South in the Northern imagination is recognized as both catalyst and producer of identity shaping. At the same time, historians began to explore how artists in the South were in turn producers of their own identity through a conceptual dialogue with Europe and Anglo-America, as they were reacted to European aesthetic traditions like of Academicism, Classicism and Baroque religious art. In the South, the development of modern art as a discipline was also catalysed by internationalism, in which a debate about how Northern and Southern ideologies would be reconfigured in one sphere, a debate that ran parallel to the regional concerns of nation-building as the next step after colonialism. European ideologies and techniques first were exported as “Art” to various regions of the South, and with this new product, Eurocentrism became commodified and consumed -- by artists, audiences of wealthy art patrons, and the state, in its search for a unifying visual language of nationalism. Early on the idea of art became fused with a sense of national representation, within the paradigm of contrasting hegemonies of contested binaries: local/international,

⁸ The blog continues: “The Modernist movement was closely tied to emerging national identities, popular struggles against colonialism, liberation, and self-searching. Like their global artistic brethren, Arab artists and cultural operators were first students of Modernism, and with time, masters of their own Modernist languages and productions that reflected something more personal and closer to home.” (ibid)

⁹ Like American cultural historian Donald Malcolm Reid, they have described this desire to “search for a lost past, the unusual, the exotic, the “Oriental” as “Westerners’ search for their own identities”. (Reid, 1992, 57)

nationalism/universalism, foreign/native, traditional/modern. Within these debates the role of indigenous art and subject took on new meanings as part of the local and the traditional, and as a signifier of both difference and national pride.

The Princess Wijdan Ali of Jordan has described Arab modern art as developing through three stages, across the majority of Arab countries, including both European colonies or mandates, like Egypt and Lebanon, which Ali describes as the forerunners of modern art in the region, and others, like Saudi Arabia, that have never gone through colonization. Ali understands the development of modern art in each country of the Arab world through three conceptual stages: learning, self-discovery, and the search for identity (Ali 1994, 73).¹⁰

¹⁰ The **learning stage** describes a period when Arab art students learned European traditions like portraits, landscapes and still life, Orientalism, Renaissance styles; sometimes they found these “new” methods (favoured by local aristocracy) liberating from circumscribed traditions. In the **self-discovery stage**, artists discovered a disconnectedness between their artistic vision and the world around them, between their present influenced by a Western art world and their past rich with its own aesthetic and cultural traditions; trying to bridge these gaps, they used European styles (e.g. Academic style) and local Arab subject matter (local landscapes, peasant women instead of society ladies or nymphs of Western paintings). In the **search for identity stage**, culture and art began to become politicized with political independence (mostly from Western colonization) sweeping across the region. Heritage, nationalism and cultural reawakening were intertwined as both artists and the state sought out new visual languages to express a national identity that would resonate locally and internationally. (Ali, 1994, 73)

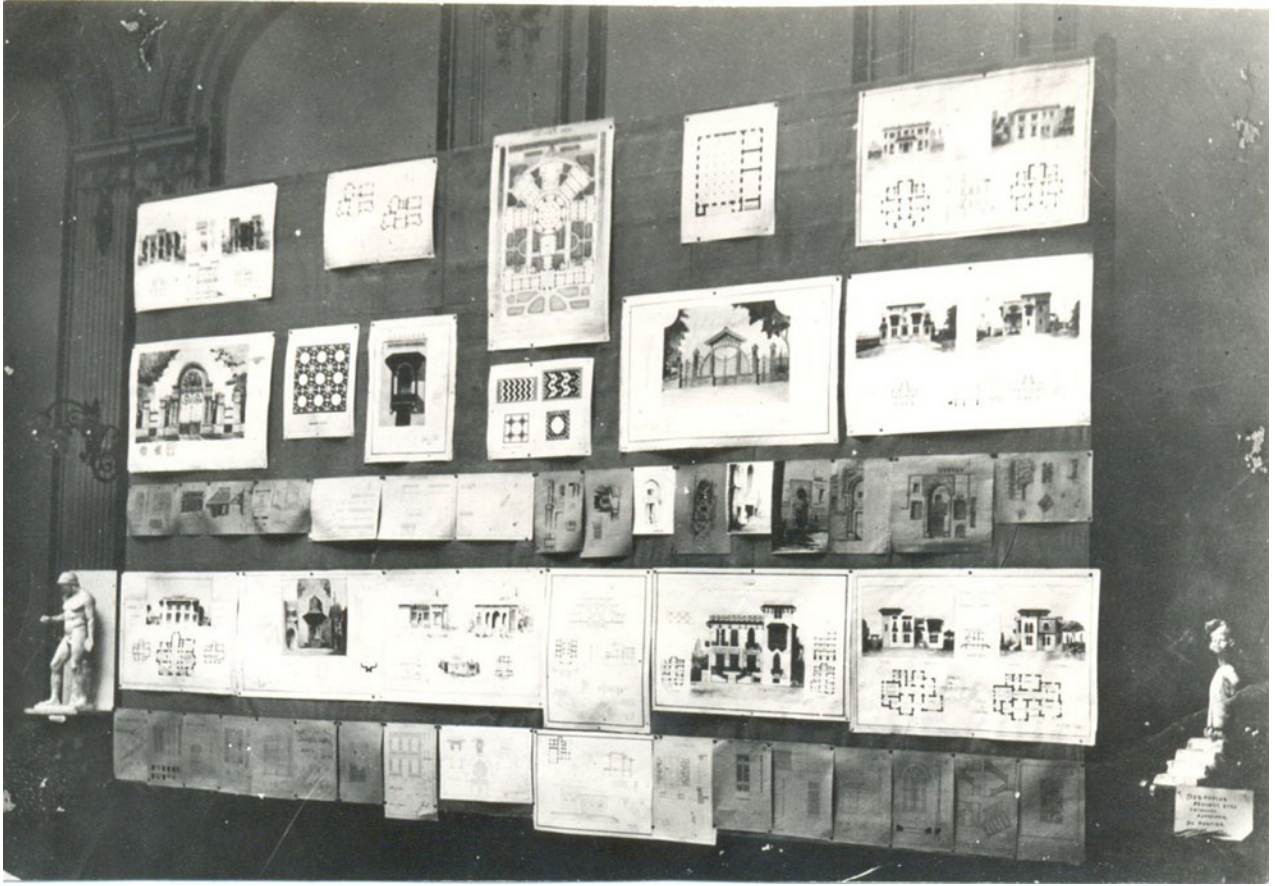


Image 1a: An example illustrating Wijdan Ali's first stage of modern Arab art, the first exhibition of the École Égyptienne des Beaux-Arts, Cairo Automobile Club, 1910 (Collection Dr. Emad Abu Ghazi).



PARIJ.

PHOTO. ABEL.

Image 1b: Arwork illustrating Ali's self-discovery stage: Mahmoud Mukhtar's first model of Nadhat Misr, 1920 (collection Dr. Emad Abu Ghazi).



Image 1c: Artwork illustrating Ali's search for identity stage: Fouad Kamel, *Moves of Lust*, 1939.

At each stage, Ali recounts a story of contrasting systems, in which local dominant traditions, indigenous traditions, and European traditions of art were re-configured and experimented upon by artists using different formulas of representation. Ali's proposal of learning, self-discovery, and search for identity are a starting point through which to examine the spaces developed for art and modernity across the South in the 20th and 21st centuries. Rather than understanding these as a linear progression, Ali's proposal can be applied as spheres of understanding to which new dimensions are added.

This chapter will examine how artists went through the first 'learning stage,' in which art education was formalised in two places, compounded by an artist-driven interest in self-discovery that branched out into new spheres for expression, perpetuating a further search for identity that was located in zones of learning, zones of autonomous self-expression, and zones of institutionalised discovery. An exploration of how these phases

are unique to the experience of act of becoming a modern and contemporary artist the global South, where each generation of artists must first come to terms with the kind of DuBoisian double consciousness. In this act of becoming, every artist and art movement situated in the periphery of the art world learns to see themselves through the lens of difference, reconciling the individual artistic identity with the artistic identity assigned by a distant art-institution centre. The following sections explore how Ali's stages can be collapsible, each representing separate temporalities of artistic theory converging in theme from various geographic planes of existence developing simultaneously across the South.

The First of the Last Academies

To begin, education undoubtedly provided the first formalised doorway into a Eurocentric art system, against the backdrop of pre-existing local ideas about art and aesthetic traditions that had developed in diverse ways over thousands of years. This occurred in two ways: the artist of the South either travelled to Europe to study fine arts with the European masters in formalised fine arts academies, or the academies were brought to them, when the first Beaux-arts academies for native youth were established. These actual schools of Beaux-arts tradition marked the beginning of the school of modern art, which imported European artists and methods to produce the local artists who would become the new canons of modern artists in the South. Across the South, they were founded almost always near the end of the colonial period. In Egypt, Mexico, and Lebanon they appeared at the very end of the colonial period, while smaller nations like El Salvador sent their artists to be trained in regional art schools until they formed their own official academy in the early years after independence. In this period of change, subtle subtexts in the curriculum choices were precursors of resistance, instilled in the schools from the very beginning and playing a role in their ability to last into the eras after colonization (several are even still operating today). Agency and its role in cultural

expression went hand-in-hand with the implementation of these first schools as an important stage for the building of the modern era.

In 1908 the twenty-six year old prince Youssef Kamal, part of the local aristocracy, opened the first fine arts school¹¹ in the Arab world, The École Égyptienne des Beaux-Arts in Cairo. For the first state-sponsored institution to teach fine arts, Kamel did not choose the education system of the British occupiers (who would remain in Egypt for the next fifteen years until 1922). Instead he elected a curriculum from France, staffing it with mostly French and Italian instructors who taught painting, sculpture, architecture, design and calligraphy (École 6, cited in Seggerman 2). Like other members of Egypt's intellectual elite at the turn of the century who had begun to embrace nationalism, Kamel "advocated independence through peaceful means, such as educating and mobilizing masses of people in progressive action programs" (Ali 1994, 75).

The academy opened against a backdrop of a city that had been undergoing modernization processes since the previous century. Cairo cityscape had been influenced by Baroque art and architecture in the 1800s when "as part of the modernization process, the Ottoman sultans and Mohammed Ali of Egypt... invited European artists to paint their portraits and engaged architects and designers to build and decorate their new palaces and public parks in Baroque and Rococo styles." (Shabout 2007, 15). The Arab renaissance (al-Nahda) of the late 19th and early 20th century that spread from Egypt to the Levantine, was "a period of revival in literature and poetry [but] a total Westernization process in the case of the plastic arts" when Islamic aesthetics in Arab art took second-seat at the urging of the intellectuals of al-Nahda, who viewed the arts of the Arab world as not advancing enough as European arts had developed, according to the American art historian Nada Shabout, of Palestinian-Iraqi heritage (Shabout, 2007, 15). Thus the aesthetic system changed when "the Western notion of Islamic art as decorative

¹¹ Although formal and informal art education existed for centuries before the founding of the École Égyptienne, it was the first to formalize art education using Western styles and techniques. (Ali 1994, 75)

artefact was accepted by Arab artists, along with other Western ideals and concepts.” (Shabout 2007, 17).¹²

Kamel’s 1908 École Égyptienne des Beaux-Arts in Cairo reflected the trend of “maintaining the old cultural forms while adopting Western technology” (Celik 57). Despite its French name, the academy differed from the art societies, salons, and educational institutions of Orientalist style that had been established in the Arab world for Europeans, largely excluding Arab artists (Shabout 2007, 17-18). The change marked a new period in which Arab artists would voice the desires of independence and newfound national identity and its configurations of the local and foreign. Soon after the first students began to graduate from the beaux-arts academy, Ali provided grants to continue their studies in Europe, like many aristocracy funded grants of the time (Shabout 2007, 21). The founding of the academy formed part of a larger institutionalisation of the arts and culture that had begun a few years earlier. Cairo had just undergone a massive urbanisation project in the late 1800s by Khedive (viceroy) Isma’il Pasha, who is credited with modernizing the country under Ottoman rule through economic, industrial and urban developments. Isma’il’s remaking of Cairo was inspired by his visit to Paris for the 1867 world’s fair, and included European-style palaces, an opera house, public gardens and large radiating boulevards around town squares, including the site known today as Tahrir Square, the site of historic political demonstrations like the Bread Riots of 1977, the 2003 protests against the US war in Iraq, and the Egyptian revolution of 2011 (Vatikiotis 1986, 194). Cairo’s major museums were also being established in this period: New sites for the Egyptian Museum and Museum of Arab art were built in 1903; The Coptic Museum was established in 1908 (Reid 1997, 62).

¹² In this search for cultural identity that took place during al-Nada in the MENA, historian Zeynib Çelik identifies these three architectural representations as belonging to a trend that was part of an ongoing discussion of identity between the Ottoman and Egyptian governments of the time: “...the definition of cultural identity was much debated among the Westernizing Turks and Egyptians during this intense period of sociocultural transformation. Some called for maintaining the old cultural forms while adopting Western technology; others wanted either to incorporate new elements into the local culture, thereby creating a rupture between the old and the new, or to evaluate and redefine their self-identity according to Western views. (57)

In Latin America, a similar process of educational communities in European-style academies, a process into which historians have also read subtle texts of resistance on the part of the local elites. The first major European-style art academy in the continent was established as an engraving school in 1781 in Mexico City, just thirty years before the end of the 300 year colonial Spanish rule. The San Carlos Academy, sponsored by the Spanish crown and private patrons, was directed by Spanish Jerónimo Antonio Gil, an Academic realist and Neoclassist engraver, who had petitioned the viceroy to create a formal academy after Gil experienced a strong interest from students who he tutored in the evenings while he was employed at the Royal Mint to engrave coins (Donahue-Wallace 225). From the beginning, the school had the vision of fomenting an ‘official art,’ as Gil modelled it “on the French Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture, a state-sponsored art school and manufacturing center established in 1648, which aimed to improve manufacturing skills, promote an official art, and wrest production away from the guilds” (ibid).¹³

Because the school endorsed neoclassicism over baroque style, it was able to survive the Mexican War of Independence (1810-1821) that ended colonial rule. After the war, it was reopened as the National Academy of San Carlos by a national government that viewed the baroque as symbolic of colonialism. In 1913 a student and teacher strike led to a change from classic European training to a modernist approach (Galindo 70-72). Though San Carlos drew students from all over the Spanish-speaking Americas as one of the most prominent art schools in the region, other fine arts academies sprung up in neighbouring countries as well. Once such academy was founded in 1876 in San Salvador, some thirty-eight years after independence, under the presidency of Francisco Dueñas. It was led by two French immigrants who distinguished the school through employing a French model

¹³ The same model had been used for the royal academies already functioning in Madrid and Valencia, of which Gil was a member. He first hired local teachers, but soon replaced them with Spanish artists to promote Spanish over local tastes, as part of the centralisation endorsed by the Spanish King Carlos III. The neoclassic curriculum of the school reflected the trend that had spread across Europe during the 17th century, with the neoclassic style inspired by the ‘classic’ art and culture of Greece and Rome, as the dominant school of art that functioned in counter to the baroque style from the previous century that had lost popularity (Conaculta website).

in the curriculum, leaving behind what local historians Bahamond and Janowski describe as, “*la enseñanza artesanal copista colonial, fomentada por los españoles hasta 1876*”¹⁴ (Bahamond and Janowski 2000, 13). Salvadoran art historian Astrid Bahamond describes a nationalist feeling shortly after independence that rejected the baroque visual language expressed through the colonial architecture of Salvadoran churches and monestaries, and favoured neoclassicism as an art of reason that put itself “at the service of a new society of equality, fraternity and liberty.” (Bahamond 2011, 8).

Around the same period when Islamic art was being categorized as decorative artefact, the indigenous aesthetic traditions of Latin America were being re-classified from a religious to an ethnic art. European trade developed new markets for the art of various American indigenous groups, art traditions that had previously been made only for an indigenous public for ritual and religious purposes became categorized as ethnic art and craft towards the end of colonization, as European invaders took an interest in their artistry. It was labelled and then commodified through a European-style system that promoted certain craftspeople by name and created new markets for their art (Scott 1999, 190).¹⁵ Unlike other American republics, Bahamond Panamá notes that in San Salvador there was not a strong symbiosis or syncretism that occurred between pre-colombian art and Spanish baroque style (as evidenced for example, in the image of the Mexican Virgin of Guadalupe who’s style of dress and symbolic imagery are coded with indigenous signs).¹⁶

¹⁴ “the colonial copyist artisan style of teaching reinforced by the Spanish until 1876” (author’s translation).

¹⁵ In *Latin American Art* (1999), John F. Scott describes the incorporation of indigenous aesthetic practices into a Eurocentric art system: “Indigenous groups in Latin America continued artistic production for their own purposes into this century, when those crafts became appreciated for their artistry. At that point they can be considered ethnic art: an art which is recognizably distinct from that of the dominant culture and prized for this distinctiveness. Traders developed markets for these products, and outstanding craftspeople were identified and promoted by name, their uniqueness and quality stressed. In this way, a more Western marketing strategy was applied to traditional crafts, causing them to respond to market pressures.” (190)

¹⁶ However, in El Salvador and across the Americas, the like in the rest of the continent, shortly after independence, the institution of the Catholic church was seen as a representation of colonial rule. This was signified visually by the baroque art of the church, which had already become part of the landscape. Bahamond recounts the rejection of the baroque landscape as a rejection of colonial rule, implicit in the implementation of a new visual architecture and aesthetic: “Si durante la época colonial, el arte barroco sirvió como vehículo pedagógico para la conversión religiosa, resulta obvio el cambio de fisonomía de las

The style of neo-classicism was not only expressed in the art curriculum of the first schools, but, as Bahamond describes, it was also implemented in new buildings that sprung up around Southern capital cities in Latin America (p.14), creating a neoclassic physical space in which new artists not only studied but lived. The role of education changed from a ‘pedagogic vehicle for religious conversion’ to a vehicle for a new state identity, and the first fine art schools were a prime example of this in Latin America.

Two religious traditions -- the baroque of Catholic church art and the geometric abstraction of Islamic art -- fell out of popularity in the push for modern aesthetics that looked to Orientalism, Neo-classicism, Beaux Arts, and other European styles as a pathway into the future of both urban landscape and local painters. Religion had played a central role in the formation of artistic and national identity. Just like in El Salvador, Mexico and Egypt, in Lebanon the artistic currents of the West were first introduced through the baroque painting taught by missionaries to the Christian population (Shabout 2007, 19). In Lebanon, this was especially influential since the first fine arts academy was not started until 1937 by Lebanese artist César Gemayel and engineer Alexis Boutros (just six years before independence from its previous status as a mandate of France). These case studies from four settings demonstrate the continuity of several themes that greatly affected what it meant to become an artist from the South in the late 1800/early 1900s. The first generations of artists in modern times in the South learned European aesthetics through the art communities that grew around the first formalized modern academies, which were fundamentally informed by the early transnational cultural exchanges between teacher and student, and students who would go on to study abroad funded by local aristocracy and later government grants.

Modernismo and the New Nation State

A period of self-discovery for artists in Latin America began under the spirit of national independence.¹⁷ One of the earliest theories of modernism in the Americas is credited to Rubén Darío (1867-1916), a young Nicaraguan poet of indigeneous, African and Spanish descent self-published his first collection of poems titled *Azul...* in 1888 in Valparaíso, Chile. His work reconfigured concepts of time, cultural difference and was facilitated by a new internationalism that fomented a Latin American identity through regional and transcontinental cultural exchange. Drawing upon native legend, Greco-Roman mythology, French symbolism, Western history and culture, it's widely credited as representative of the new era of art from the Americas, a "hybrid fusion of European and non-European styles, the use of pre-Columbian sources, and an awareness of historical time." (Rojas-Sotelo 31). In the short stories and poems of *Azul...*,¹⁸ Darío's protagonists are fairies, princesses and artists searching for an aesthetic ideal, an "ideal of beauty that would restore to the world it's lost unity and harmony" (González Echevarría 31). But this ideal is not always reachable, and the artists "are constantly frustrated in their efforts by mindless, decadent aristocrats," (ibid). The allegory he provided resounded with many artists and writers of the time, whose artistic community was in many ways defined and confined by the desires of the rich. In 1900s San Salvador, the coffee plantation wealth created an elite patronage with dreams of Europe and a majority of dispossessed indigenous and mestizos who were robbed of their land, plunged into poverty as labourers in the coffee plantations. This was a deeply divided new country after independence, an experience which marked the development of an intellectual infrastructure created by figures like Darío and Gavidia in the sphere of the literary group and magazine *La Juventud*, (the youth) as argued by American historian E. Bradford Burns:

¹⁷ In many sites of the South this took place during the end of the eighteenth century and first twenty years of the nineteenth century.

¹⁸ Blue...

Through the meetings of La Juventud, Modernism entered El Salvador, introduced principally by the young Francisco Gavidia (1863-1955) and his even younger Nicaraguan friend Rubén Darío (1867-1916)... Modernism played a fascinating role in the intellectual history of El Salvador. It illustrates, at least for the period under study in this essay, how the economic and political setting shaped literature. (p. 69)¹⁹

Burns describes this decidedly secular Latin American modernism as accepting of the doctrines of positivism and modernism, with a longing for the exotic and distant places and lack of social critique that would later develop as a part of the same Modernism that had produced the oppression of the landless masses by a few elite families. The *modernista* aesthetics pioneered by Darío in *Azul...* and his other works became an international hit in great part due to the international circulation of text enabled by steamboat, transatlantic cable, and international newspapers (González Echevarría 3).²⁰

The modernista aesthetics of Darío's work were ones historians have argued later appeared in the Latin American cannon of classic literature, in works of Alejo Carpentier, Garcia-Marquez, Neruda and even Borges (González Echevarría 34). *Modernismo* in literature across Latin America informed the new wave of modernism that was to follow in the visual arts (Bahamond 24). Artists like engraver Julio Ruelas, *indigenista*²¹ painter Saturnino Herrán and impressionist painter Joaquin Clausell (all of Mexico) produced artwork that moved away from visual realism, much like the way their literary

¹⁹ Burns continues, "Economic modernization activated cultural Modernism. Outwardly Modernism seemed to be a reaction against Romanticism. It signalled a break with the Spanish literary past. It attempted to destroy previous literary influences and models. It subverted traditional thought. Modernism broke tradition. In its inception, though, Modernism has little or nothing to do with Salvadorn reality. Modernis, like previous literary movements, was derivative, owing much to French models, even though, eventually, it would be respahed and redefined into a more Latin American mold, particularly by Rubén Darío [sic]." (ibid)

²⁰ Because of these new modes of communication, Spanish literary critiques hotly debated *Azul...* and Latin American authors and artists became inspired by it. Darío's writing and his critique of Latin American contemporaries that he described as "*modernismo*" has been used by art historians to put a name to the movement that ensued in both Latin American art and literature as "an anti-colonial and pre-Columbian tradition using some Western artistic values." (Rojas-Sotelo, 1). Darío's modernismo aesthetic was akin to the 'Nuestra América' the Cuban poet José Martí wrote of in 1891, calling for an anti-colonial, "multi-ethnic and cultural resistance" during the fight for Cuban independence from Spain, granted in 1898 (Rojas-Sotelo, 1).

²¹ An artist whose style represents or incorporates indigenous aesthetic and cultural traditions.

contemporaries were moving “away from long realist novels and towards poetic, sonorous words and rich images” (Scott 1999, 200).²²

Printed text became defined as a new sphere for artistic and intellectual development during this period, with the growing circulation of literary magazines like *La Juventud*, as well as newspapers, novels, other kinds of print. The heart of the artistic community began to migrate away from the school as the focus of artistic production. *La Quincena*, another cultural journal collaboration by Gavidia and Darío, featured art Nouveau and other French styles influenced the writers of the new literature, visually and textually. Darío served as the magazine’s correspondent in Paris for a time, and Gavidia was both founder and contributor. In one issue of the late 1800s, Gavidia published a proposal for El Salvador’s new national palace; encoded in his description is the formula for a new visual language that fused past and present with *modernismo* aesthetics:

Nuestro suelo es Americano, y el maya, así como el árabe, entran a formar en la población el zócalo más alto que un hombre del Palacio Nacional debería tomar. Graderías, zócalos maya-árabes, intercolumnios griegos, áticos de estatuas, rotunda y detalles greco-romanos creemos que traducirían bien lo que somos y lo que queremos ser. (*La Quincena*. II época, Imprenta Nacional, 56 cited in Bahamond 25-28).²³

Gavidia’s proposal for the national palace was never realised, and the fusion of Arabic-Mayan architecture did not become part of the visual language he had envisioned for the future. Instead, the neo-classical palace that still stands today was erected between 1905 and 1911, decorated with greco-roman columns and statues of Hernán Cortés and Isabel la Católica (Bahamond 2012, p.28-29). Here is evidence that the Southern artists of the early 1900s were not always in agreement with the structures of their period or with the aristocracy or wealthy or even the state which brought a new era into being. Although part of an elite, as Burns and others have signaled, the young writers of *modernismo* were interested in an expanded vision of art and culture, even after coming into contact with

²² Ruelas, Herrán and Clausell employed techniques inspired by Art Nouveau and Impressionism, and post-impressionism, often portraying local cultural traditions and scenes (ibid).

²³ “Onto our American soil, add the Maya as well as the Arab, to form the highest cultural base that a man of the National Palace should take. Tiered seating, Mayan-Arab plinths, Greek columns, lofty statues, rotunda and Greco-Roman details – we believe these [elements] would best translate who we are and what we want to be.” (author’s translation).

the Eurocentrist system of art and cultural history that was interested in just the opposite – repressing other art histories to maintain its centrality. As museums, salons, galleries, and auction houses were added to the local art infrastructure, a need for local artist-protagonists in these new spaces arose (Constantini 130). As the fine arts academies began to produce more graduates and many local artists returned from study abroad in Europe, they banded together and began to form autonomous collectives, discussion groups and associations like the Asociacion de Pintores y Escultores Mexicanos established in 1910, Mexico City.

Artists who received grants by local aristocracy or governments were often expected to return to contribute to the building of national art infrastructure as part of their national duty. In 1912, Prince Kamel wrote a letter to the sculptor Mahmoud Mukhtar, a graduate of the École Égyptienne who was studying in Paris at the École des Beaux-Arts on a grant from Kamel, outlining a national responsibility for artists of his generation:

You are Egyptian, and you must return to us Egyptian. You must work consciously in Paris, because we place all our hopes in you. We wait impatiently for the results of your hard work to prove that Egyptians do not lack in ideas and are not capable of succeeding in the domain of Art, which is a manifestation of civilization (Abu Ghazi and Boctor 46 cited in Seggerman 3).

Kamel's letter reveals a kind of bargain; writing to Mukhtar after his Parisian classmates associated "him with the ancient Egyptian sculptural heritage, parading him around the studio as "Ramses" as part of his hazing" (Scheid 3). The generations of artists sent abroad during the period of modernisation were expected to represent their cultural competence abroad and at home, as transnational agents who were meant to prove the competence and modernity of their homeland, in exchange for the patronage and international stardom required to be an artist in the modern era. According to Ali, Arab artists who returned from Europe continued to search for a way to reconcile these two identities by using European trends like impressionism and post-impressionism to depict local scenes, while Latin American impressionist artists like Colombian Andrés de Santamaria and Mexican Joaquín Claussell went through similar processes (Ali 74, Constantini 461).

Kamel's plea for Mukhtar to be conscious of his national origin as he worked towards the goal of 'manifesting civilization' on behalf of his countrymen, also reflects the kind of double consciousness W.E.B. DuBois theorized through African American history. Just a few years earlier, DuBois wrote, "It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, the sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity." (DuBois 1903). In many Southern capitals, artists developed this double-consciousness first in local Fine Arts academies (or private tutelage), that was then strengthened through transnational studies in Europe, and again through the arts and culture magazines that served as exhibition and critique spaces across the ocean. Darío and Gavidia collaborated on the creation of *La Quincena* magazine, published between 1903 and 1913 in San Salvador, a harbinger of hundreds of literary arts magazines published in Latin America that maintained connections with Europe²⁴ while playing a central role in the development of an intercontinental cultural scene. These kind of publications opened up a third sphere – making possible a regional art community in which transnational communication between the South and North was expanded in a way that supported the development of a regional intellectual consciousness in the case of Latin America. The growing circulation of newspapers between neighbouring countries also helped to develop and widen this regional consciousness, creating a third space, or mirror, in which artists saw their own reality and double consciousness reflected.

Towards the end of the first decade of the 1900s, the exhibition space also became a politicized sphere for an attitude of double-consciousness to develop as a form of resistance to the dominant art, culture and politics of the previous century.²⁵ The case of

²⁴ Darío reported on the latest artistic trends as the Parisian correspondent for a time, and in 1909 *La Quincena* was connected to French cultural magazines like *la Nouvelle Revue Française* and *La Revue de Deux Mondes* of Brussels, with which it shared authors and collaborators (Bahamond 35).

²⁵ By this time, Mexican art was already a site of political, cultural and social class critique developed by artists like the printmaker engraver José Guadalupe Posada (1852-1913) and was reaching new wider audiences in spaces like political cartoons of newspapers. See for example, Ades, Dawn, *Art in Latin America: The Modern Era*, p.354; 110-123.

Dr. Atl (the artistic name of Mexican artist Gerardo Murillo) illustrates the phenomenon of the transformation of central art spaces in the Americas, with the arts academy as first site of art community was transformed, all the way through to autonomization of the arts and use of exhibitions as a site of third space resistance. Like many of the famous artists of his generation, Atl was a product of the San Carlos academy in Mexico City, subsequently receiving a government grant to study art in Europe in 1897 from president/dictator Porfirio Díaz.²⁶

Upon his return to Mexico, Atl became part of what American historian Robert Patterson called a “double curriculum, one academic, the other political”(1964, 377). Organizing from within San Carlos, the Society of Mexican Painters and Sculptors joined forces with the Centro Artístico, and under the direction of Atl led a protest exhibition against the Porfirio Díaz government’s official exhibition of Spanish paintings (the latter intended to celebrate the centennial of Mexican independence from Spanish rule). Occuring just a few months before the Mexican revolution began, Atl’s 1910 counter-exhibition in San Carlos constituted an expression of nationalism and protest, with its indigenous and folkloric themes expressed in national landscapes, symbolism and locally-inspired color schemes by Mexican-born artists (Charlot 1962). These would all be themes that were exemplified in the Mexican muralist movement that followed (from the 1920s to 1970s), and was later historicized as a landmark exhibition in the history of Mexican art (Charlot 1962). The counter-exhibition as a form of political protest format and site of nationalism would also influence Mexican muralists and neo-muralist movements in Chicano art over the next century (Jackson 2009, 37).

²⁶ In Paris and Rome he earned medals for his painting, and became politicized, collaborating with the Italian Socialist Party and the magazine *Avanti* (Patterson 1964, 380-381). Atl was also influenced by Neo-Impressionism and Futurism he encountered there. He returned to Mexico and launched to the forefront of an artistic revolution, writing a manifesto in 1906 and organising an artists’ union called Centro Artístico (Charlot 1962). Atl remained connected to San Carlos as it became a site of contested pedagogies; a dialectic nationalist sentiment began to brew in the early 1900s, both resisting and building upon European art and cultural intellectual trends, making the school a microcosm that began to “mirror the internal tensions of Mexican society” (Patterson 1964, 378). Atl undertook an inventory of ancient paintings in the academy’s storage while teaching and lecturing on the new art trends he had experienced in Europe (the three great muralists, Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco and David Alfaro Siqueiros were among the students whom he mentored).

In the 1920s the search to reconcile national representation with the latest trends from of European art continued in a variety of forms: the avant-garde movement spread across the Americas and the muralist movement developed around artists' considerations of the popular and the indigenous arts and performing traditions. In 1924 the concept of anthropophagy emerged as a theoretical rendering of the cannibalistic consumption of European culture in the Americas in Oswald de Andrade's *Manifesto de Poesia Pau-Brasil*. Latin American artists also mixed Cubism with indigenous elements in the works of the artists who travelled and worked trans-Atlantically like Cuban Wilfredo Lam, Argentinian Xul Solar (née Oscar Agustín Alejandro Schulz Solari) and Uruguayan Joaquín Torres García (the travel of the later two facilitated by familial connections in Europe). Likewise, in Egypt many new artist groupings and associations began to form, borrowing names from Europe like *La Chimère* (1927), *Salon du Caire* (1923), *The Society of Fine Arts* (1921) (Karnouk 1988, 51).

Across the South, the 1920s marked the beginning of an era of state interest and patronage of a new nationalism expressed through the plastic arts. In 1921, the Mexican government began to fund public commissions for murals (at the instigation of artists like Dr. Atl), and the Ministry of Education in Egypt began to collect Egypt art (1925), including many works by female artists. The new arts movements became spaces for feminist narratives and collaborations flourished with the protagonists of new women's right movements like the nationalist Huda Sha'arawi who founded the Egyptian Feminist Union in 1923. Even though women were not accepted at Kamel's *Ecole de Beaux Arts*, the modern artist Marguerite Nakhlah (1908-1977) studied art privately and abroad, like other upper-class Egyptian women of her generation, later returning to teach at the Cairo Institute of Fine Arts for Girls (Badran 1996, 156). Some of Nakhlah's female colleagues were also grantees of the Ministry of Education who were sent abroad to study in Europe. (Ali 74).

Like Nakhlah, after study abroad in Europe, the Lebanese modernist painter Moustapha Farroukh (1901-1957), returned home in 1927 to perform “a duty in his nation” (Al-Nsuli quoted in Scheid, 210). Farroukh, a Muslim Scout member, had left Lebanon to pursue degrees of the School of Ornament and the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Italy, what he referred to as “the cradle of art,” where his work was recognized, earning an award at the Roman Bienale (Scheid 2010, 209-210). Upon his return the exhibition of his paintings in private homes and public galleries reflected the changing tides of nationalism and modernism in his country.²⁷

Farroukh employed the nude not as a reflection of prescribed Eurocentric modernity but as a way of producing a universal modernity that analysed the relationship between local and foreign conditions, as American anthropologist Kristen Shied argues (2010, 208-209). As an index of modernity, this was part of the phenomenon of the leading artists of Farroukh’s generation who “felt compelled to paint Nudes and display them as part of a culturing process they called *tathqīf* (disciplining or enculturing)” (Schied 2010, 203). This process of a restructuring of social norms was “an important element of the nationalist painters’ membership in “*al-‘aṣr al-hadīth*” (the modern era)” (ibid). Scheid contends Farroukh and his contemporaries used the nude as a kind of code for “the importance of the painters’ physical and aesthetic experiences in forming the emergent meaning of modernity”.²⁸ This hybrid embedded in the paintings of Farroukh and his contemporaries was given a welcome homecoming by both local press and Muslim scout

²⁷ The image of the female nude played an especially symbolic role in this story. Farroukh’s *The Two Prisoners* (1929), was one such painting, which used academic representational style to depict a semi-nude woman gazing at a caged parakeet as she smokes from a water pipe in an affluent home, playing upon the European tradition of using the odalisque to represent the Orient and use of the caged canary to represent female imprisonment (a symbol borrowed from academic painting). Farrouk employed these metaphors as way to describe a woman addicted to the accumulation of wealth and luxury; visually and physically the woman and her surroundings appear to be somewhere inbetween Arab and European identity.

²⁸ Like Farroukh, who used the nude as a signifier of his participation in the European movement, and *tathqīf* to show his commitment to Lebanon as a progressive, Muslim artist, the first graduates of Prince Kamel’s school embedded this search for local – international in the styles they developed. “They tried to combine their ancient artistic traditions with contemporary techniques and teachings, reshaping them with a distinct Egyptian individuality that emerged out of the country’s pharaonic and Mediterranean past. Depicting local subjects, the first graduates of the School of Fine Arts expressed the nationalistic fervor building in their country, basing this sentiment on Egypt’s pharaonic legacy.” (Seggerman 75).

patrons and leaders,²⁹ contrary to “the common assumption [in the art historicization of the region] that paintings of nude women posed a threat to Lebanese and Arab viewers but also to the notion that those viewers posed an obstacle to the development of fine arts in the Arab world,” (p. 208). The well known Lebanese scholar and reformer Butrus al-Bustani, a major figure in al Nahda (renaissance) of the late 19th century described in the previous section,³⁰ described the attitude of the times regarding local debates about modernity as “neither rejection of nor submission to Western-introduced concepts, acquiescence to no cultural givens.” (Makdisi referenced in Shied 2010, 212).

Widely regarded as one of Lebanon’s forerunning painters of the 20th century, Farroukh contributed to the local art infrastructure upon his return to Lebanon, establishing a permanent exhibiton of his work, participating in al Nahda gatherings with philosophers and artists, writing five books and teaching art at the American University of Beirut (Reynolds, 197). His modernist contemporaries from distant Southern capitals, Wifredo Lamm (Cuba, 1902-1982)³¹, Joaquin Garcia-Torres (Uruguay 1874-1949), were also part of European art movements and groups during years of living abroad, and upon returning home helped build the local art infrastructure through training younger artists, forming part of local intellectual groups and leaving legacies of art centres and re-invented schools.

²⁹ Scheid quotes the Scoutmaster Muhi al-Din al-Nusli as praising Farroukh’s paintings featuring the female nude in beaux-arts style, in a speech to his fellow believers in Islam and dutiful citizens in favor of accepting new forms of art: “Shall we cling to old, antiquated, intolerant traditions or shall we walk with life, live, and give life to the art that we honor on the evening of the first day of the New Year? We, the sons of the era of the new [‘asr al-jadid], encourage art and are accepting of it.” (p. 211).

³⁰ Called al-Nahda or “the awakening” or “renaissance”, this movement of intellectual modernization and reform began in Cairo in the late 1800s and moved to surrounding Arab states under Ottoman rule, protagonized by intellectuals like al-Bustani who were “planting the roots of modernity through their experiments in language, rhetoric, and literature” (Sheehi, intro). Stephen Sheehi’s *Foundations of Modern Arab Identity* (2004) argues against the structuralist historicization of this event as primarily a reaction to Western invasion (Napolean’s invasion) by exploring how intellectual elites like al-Bustani “actively produced indigenous ideologies of modernity while struggling against the overwhelming powers of Western colonialism.” (Volk, 132-4)

³¹ Lam famously said in 19 “My painting is an act of decolonization (un acto de descolonizacion)” (Baakmann and Craven 2010, 1).

In each case of the four Southern cities, artist networks, along with manifestos, associations and groups began to grow in number as their activities expanded with their scope of transnationalism. Even though there is evidence of artists from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds who rose to fame during this era, as Darío and Celik allude to, the art sphere was undoubtedly dominated by a small wealthy elite in many Souths, and among whom there was still a preference for European culture and tradition even as colonization was either ending or nearly over. Europe no longer reigned over the geography of the land, but its influence remained king over the desires of the ruling elite, whose ties to the old continent meant privilege, cultural capital, and sometimes economic advantage.

Artist Groups, Movements and the fusion of Art & Politics

The end of the 1920s and 1930s marked the beginnings of a new role for art and a period of new theorizing by artists about its purpose and methods for expressing ideologies about identity, history and territory through art. Artist associations, lectures, and groups were fast becoming politicized as sites of new inspiration for a kind of art-making that reacted critically to larger international cultural trends and local concerns. Mustafa Farroukh and his contemporaries Saliba Douaihy, César Gemayel and Omar Onsi formed a movement in Lebanese art with the development of their own visual language based upon Lebanese folklore and landscapes (Corm 2002, 1). Similarly, *costumbrista*³² movements throughout LA formed around local culture and *pasajismo nacional*.³³ These collective groupings of artists inherited an interest in the role of local aesthetics and culture from their predecessors, and thus began to create independent spaces where transnational debates about the reconfiguring of the local and international underwent serious change, most markedly from object-based to ideas-based way of understanding art, nation and territory. In 1930s El Salvador, groups like the Sociedad de los Amigos

³² Traditionalist

³³ National landscapes

del Arte created autonomous spaces for theorizing art outside the institutions that had previously dominated these debates for the past century, with the creation and expansion of artist-run spaces: exhibitions, conferences, tertulias, talks, magazines and manifestos (Bahamond 2012). The large museums of the North were also beginning to take interest in the art of the South; the Museum of Modern Art in New York City began a Latin American art collection in 1935, and many of the Mexican muralists began to take commissions in other Northern cities. Even as these institutional spaces grew in size and clout with the onset of increased structuralism and institutionalization of culture that would take hold in the 1940s and 50s, the autonomous artist spaces were also fast becoming an influential component to local arts infrastructures. Informal education continued to grow as well. Both of these factors set the scene for a radicalization of art, politics and national ideologies that was to take place across the South in the 1930s.

One of the widest spread collective practice trends in this era can be found in the case of the international Surrealism, a movement that included a constellation of groups between Northern and Southern capitals, whom saw their own struggles mirrored in each other's politicized responses to local and international crises. The way surrealism was adapted and intervened upon by artist working in different local contexts is one of the most documented in the history of modern art, and both Arab and Latin American artists protagonized these movements by bringing to the forefront issues of cultural and gender difference, hybrid identities, and radical education, embedding in their art a politicized critique of the state and its hegemonies embedded in art.³⁴

³⁴ In 1938, the International Federation of Independent Revolutionary Art (called FIARI after its French acronym) was created as an international collective of artists and intellectuals who were dedicated to “emancipating the imagination from any and all constraints” (DaCoss 231). Chapters of the group were formed in Cairo, Santiago (Chile), Fort-de-France (Martinique), Paris, Brussels London, and New York City. The artists in each chapter used revolutionary rhetoric to simultaneously address issues in the local art scene and other issues in international politics, fusing new political ideals and a rhetoric of resistance into the new aesthetic languages they were creating. FIARI was conceived of in 1938 in Mexico City, at the house of Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo, where Trotsky was in exile, in a manifesto originally signed only by Breton and Rivera. Rivera was subsequently referenced in the manifestos and writings of the FIARI chapters. Later Breton revealed in a private letter that Rivera had signed in place of Trotsky at his request, for “tactical reasons,” and declared Trotsky and Breton to be the true authors (Chipp and Selz 1968, 486;457). Though by this time, Rivera and Mexico City had already been identified by other surrealist groups as an important point on the surrealist constellation of thinkers and contexts.

The work of many historians who have described the Surrealist movement reveals two kinds of internationalist art and politics paradigms at work; one developed by a global South perspective (as evidenced in the work of the Egyptian surrealists and LA members of Northern Surrealist movements like Roberto Matta and Lam), and the other envisioned by European surrealists like Breton, Antonin Artaud and Louis Aragon, who started the movement in France. Even before the dialogue and exchange with artists from the global South (especially in LA and North Africa), the French surrealists' who had begun to form in the 1920s, had imagined the political, social and cultural causes of the South to be an outlet for their resistance, mostly through their vision of Orientalist ways of viewing everything South of Europe.³⁵ The surrealists looked for the mythical magical inspiration to free their imagination in the streets and rural roads of the South in their travels, which bordered on tourism in places like Mexico, Egypt, and Native America. They also saw the intuitive magic in migrants they knew in France like Baya Mehieddine, a self-taught Algerian artist who showed work in the same galleries. Breton categorized her as a natural surrealist (a label he also bestowed somewhat condescendingly upon Frida Kahlo, as Baddeley and Fraser point out) does not go beyond the Orientalist myth: he describes her as a "lifting a corner of the veil" and her aesthetics as "secretly tak[ing] part in extracts of perfumes from *the Thousand and One Nights*." (Breton cited in Antle 2006, 11). In both their own country and abroad, the French surrealists' vision of their Southern contemporaries were strongly influenced by typecasts fixed in their imagination by the anthropological myth of Orientalism, as Antle has argued.

But as the French surrealists began to become involved with the global South, a shift in their thinking occurred, and they evolved from an official discourse of a mythic

³⁵ Their counter-culture ethos envisioned this Othered part of the world through a romanticized gaze, searching for the antidote to reason and Western rationalism in the myths and magic of the South, from North Africa to Latin America, even declaring their affinity with the South in the North they found in African American poetry and Native American Hopi traditions. Anti-nationalist Breton and Artaud proclaimed the death of Western rationalism, believing the intuitive culture of 'the other' to be the opposite of rational Western logic. Founding member Louis Aragon wrote in 1931, "You, West, are condemned to die. We have been victorious in Europe. Let the Orient, your terror, finally answer our hopes!"

romanticized Orient to actual engagement with the Orient that led to “a dialogue or exchange with the Other” (Antle 2006, 5).³⁶ Instead of seeing their Southern colleagues as equals with their own struggles and diverse needs/concerns, there is much evidence indicating the French surrealists saw the South as a tool for their own expression of rebellion against European rationalism and the state. Because they held this romanticised view of the South as site of their desires, it was necessary for them to compress their ideas of aesthetics of the South into fixed essentialised symbols (or stereotypes, like the Scheherazade or intuitive innately naïve popular art of Mexico). While interested in diverse internationalist aesthetics, their view of internationalism was one that compressed large regions into limited truisms, rather than opening up new modes of theorizing through art.

In the case of the Egyptian surrealists, however, there is evidence of an international theory that finds new avenues for theorizing the modern and the ancient together. Inspired by the surrealist’s fusion of art and anti-fascist politics and rejection of past art trends, poet journalist Henein started the artist group *Art et Liberté* after returning to Cairo in 1937. In 1938, the group became a FIARI chapter, inspired by what they understood as a kind of surrealist endorsement of socialist pluralism that contradicted the Soviet socialist realism (Baackmann and Craven 2009, iii). Like the other chapters and contexts in which surrealism developed, they were interested in blending new ideologies with art (libertarian, anti-capitalism, the philosophical subconscious), and studying the boundaries between the everyday art of the popular classes and elite art of the gallery. But unlike the groups of the North, the Cairene Surrealists were also concerned with the legacy of hybrid identity they had inherited from the artists and poets before them. *Art et Liberté* wanted to find a common ground between the new codes they encountered in European visuality and the poetics of Egyptian aesthetic heritages, from local Cairene

³⁶ Breton got involved directly in struggles and contexts of the South, most notably in Haiti, Mexico and Egypt (for example, in the Haitian revolution and in 1936 started a friendship with the Georges Henein, a young Egyptian of Coptic-Italian heritage who was studying abroad in Paris. Still, as Antle and several other historians argue, the French surrealists engagement with international discourse and the South was never able to surpass the limits of cultural appropriation that dominated their perspective (DaCoss, Antle, Seggerman).

street culture to indigenous popular traditions of groups like the Berber to the traditions of Islamic art and new usages of Ancient Egyptian signs and symbols. They spoke out against the popularity of Academic art and “conservative pharaonicism” that was still being taught in the Fine Arts Academy, as well as the colonial presence of British troupes in Egypt, the Egyptian aristocracy, Muslim nationalism, the local bourgeoisie, and the oppression of women and the working class poor (LaCoss 2009, 28). The group was concerned with cultural difference, not just between the elite art world and the people on the street but also between South and North, East and West. Mexico City and Diego Rivera often showed up in their writings as a reference point for parallel, in response to the Nazi crusade against degenerate art. *Art et Liberté* members wrote their own declaration against the idea of modern art following a “fanatical racist, religious and nationalistic path”.³⁷

The members of *Art et Liberté* were concerned with the political possibilities of art for understanding their positioning both locally and internationally, and they found inspiration in comparing their own struggles to those of other Souths. The way they appropriated and intervened into the realms of journalism and education were drastically more theoretical and conceptual than their forerunners who studied at the Ecole de Beaux Arts in the 1910s.³⁸ In the 2010s, historians began to historicize the actions of the Egyptian Surrealists through a radical critical lens of art and ideology. Their appearance as an academic subject for study reveals a kind of historicization, which rather than consider the Egyptian surrealists as a derivative or imitation of their European counterparts, focuses instead upon the interventions they brought to both international and local theorizing about nation, art, and politics. Kane traces a kind of South-North-

³⁷ Full quote: “It is well known that modern society looks with aversion on any innovative creation in art and literature which threatens the cultural system on which that society is based, whether it be from the point of view of thought or of meaning... We believe that the fanatical racist, religious and nationalistic path which certain individuals wish modern art to follow is simply contemptible and ridiculous.” (translated in Rosemont and Kelley 148, cited in Seggerman 11).

³⁸ American Middle Eastern Studies scholar Patrick Kane writes, “George Henein’s initiatives and the beginnings of Egyptian Surrealism in 1937 drew upon the legacy and importance of journalism in Egyptian discourse. The roots of this radical movement stemmed from a critical line of social inquiry and critique of elite domination and influence.” (2010, 112).

South theorizing the members of *Art et Liberté* developed that included parallel struggles from other countries as mirrors in which they saw reflected the universality of the issues that were at the heart of their local struggles, or at the very least a common currency of ideas between aesthetic languages of resistance against dominant hegemonies of the state that marked lines between gender, social class, and left overs from colonialism – all lines which the Egyptian surrealists crossed in their writings, art practices and political endeavours.³⁹

The counter discourse envisioned by *Art et Liberté* marked a new kind of ideological art that they initiated in the 1930s and 40s, in stark contrast to the Egyptian art of the previous decades which had been centred around the sphere of the European fine arts academy and reflected the taste of local aristocratic patrons (Seggerman). It was a leap from transnationalism coded in paintings to transnationalism coded in ideological art that was not limited to objects (but included a range of expressions and conceptual modes). The members of the group declared themselves against “appalling wave of academic painting,” as well as an affinity with childhood curiosity, and the internationalism of the larger Surrealist movement (Antle 7). In many texts published by Henien, as well as the writer and painter Kamel El-Telmissany, and other members of the group, they delineate a map that consistently makes visible the role of the Southern art traditions and artists, and its importance to the global art scene, as equals of European art traditions (and often this narrative mapping includes Mexico, Egypt, and other Souths in thematic dialogue

³⁹ “From the late 1930s to the late 1940s, the Surrealists Ramsis Yunan, Georges Henein, Al-Tilmisani, Anwar Kamil, and Fu’ad Kamil compared their reading of Freud and Marxist criticism with other contemporary crises—the Spanish Civil War and the Mexican Revolution—as external modes of struggle. The Egyptian labor movement was an archetype for the internal experience and application of this experience. The surrealist injection in the arts was also in part a response from an increasing rise in the ranks of artists from wider social strata, particularly from the emergence of art teachers in public education, who applied their art education to spur the arts into social advocacy against the intended role of this pedagogy’s founders. The surrealists formed a subculture in the arts, in which artists from both genders and various social classes and religious and national backgrounds organized exhibits on the Surrealist discourse of the psychological torment of the individual and collective body. Yunan’s drawings of contorted minotaurs were emblematic of a critique of state torture. Surrealism provided a useful counter discourse in the arts that appealed to a rising generation of artists and art teachers in postwar Egypt, and while the most prominent of the Surrealists remained aloof and distant from the subject of the masses, their critique of the bourgeois, liberal direction of the art academies and institutions dominated by the aristocratic landholding class was a major contribution and remained a continuing counterdiscourse as a new language in the arts well into the 1960s.” (Kane 112)

with artists from various European countries, all of whom participated in a universal counter-culture movement). In the words of Telmissany and Younane we can see a kind of internationalism that went beyond the oppression of Eurocentrism that had been taught through colonial models, and envisioned artists and contexts from both South and North as equally important in a common struggle of ideas.

“Art does not belong to a territory. Chirico is not more Italian than Delvaux is Belgian than Diego Rivera is Mexican than Tanguy is French than Max Ernst is German than Telmissany is Egyptian. All these men participate in the same fraternal struggle against the logic of the bell tower and of the minaret...” (Telmissany, in the French-language journal *Don Quichotte*, published in Cairo, 1940, cited in Alexandrian 29).

“...integrating the activity of Egypt’s young artists into the expansive circuit of modern art, passionate and vibrant, which rebels against any police, religious, or commercial instruction, the art whose pulse is felt in New York, London, and Mexico City, in every place where the Diego Rivas [sic], Paalens, Tanguys, and Henry Moores fight, everywhere that men have yet to despair of the total freedom of the human consciousness.” (“La desagregation des mythes,” in *Passages, recueil de textes en homage a Ramses Younane*, not paginated. (Cairo: Ministère de la Culture 1998, cited in Antle 7).

From Telmissany’s fraternity of artists who defy territorial boundaries and hierarchies in their resistance to “the logic of the belltower and minaret” (a reference to religious dominance as symbolised by the architecture of the Catholic church bell tower and the mosque’s minaret), to Younan’s anti-institutional stance on freedom, Mexico City and Cairo appear together with Northern territory on the same level of importance (sans the usual hierarchy that was present in the French surrealist writings and thought). Keeping in line with this thinking that included the South as equals in art and political endeavours, Younan described his position of refusing to accept dominance and erasure as part of the post colonial legacy as “cultural resonance” rather than “cultural invasion”.⁴⁰

Instead, Younan recognizes a theoretical stance of influence and flows between North and South that would later be picked upon by historians like Baddeley and Fraser in the 1980s and 90s. The references drawn out in these narrative mappings of art and the

⁴⁰ “It is often said that modern art became international as a result of colonialism, which culturally as well as militarily invades the colonized countries, thus destroying their traditions and their arts. However, we should realize that modern European art has been influenced by Eastern and African arts before any Eastern or African artist was influenced by European art. Therefore, cultural invasion is not the issue. It is rather cultural resonance...” Ramses Younan’s text from 1956 article, quoted in Karnouk 2005, 35).

system expanded from Surrealism are unique in that they offer some of the first documented renderings of this South-South art map in a modern context. Unfortunately, for whatever reasons, this map was narrowed to the point of excluding the Egyptian surrealists in a global narrative of modern art that took the West as its centre. While French surrealists declared allegiances with many Souths and cultures, Egyptian surrealists went further in laying a claim to the movement and their interventions into it. Kamel Al-Telmissany argued that Surrealism was not a “specifically French movement... rather it is a movement that is primarily defined by the globalism of its thinking and its actions...” (Telmissany quoted in Seggerman 11). The Egyptian surrealists founded the bilingual Arabic-French magazine *Al-Tatawwur* (evolution) in 1940, dubbing it “the first avant-garde literary and artistic review in the Arabic language” (Alexandrian 30 quoted in Seggerman 13). Henein described the importance of language and bilingualism in the movement, outlining a key way that Egyptian surrealists differed from their French counterparts as a “dual cultural belonging.”⁴¹

Thus Egyptian surrealism also intervened in the larger surrealist movement through their emphasis on two key elements: cultural difference and bilingualism (Antle 9, Shabout 26-27, Seggerman 20-21). In Egypt, they implemented a new structure for art making that conceptualised difference and aesthetics through ideological and political means, leaving a legacy that historians have argued can still be seen in the visual culture of today. Alexandra Dika Seggerman describes their role in the paradigm shift from object-based to ideological art, and from school to artist group-based locus of artistic production and thought:

Where earlier artists, such as Mahmoud Mukhtar and Mahmoud Said, employed clear visual references to both ancient Egypt and local culture, artists after the surrealists incorporated Egyptian identity into their art in a more theoretical way. (2013, 1)⁴²

⁴¹ We are expecting two simultaneous movements, which cannot be considered absolutely contradictory. On the one hand, the Arabic language is resurfacing and affirming itself as a passionate connection and instrument of independence; on the other, the need of modernity gives rise to a dual cultural belonging that forces [these writers] to rely on a foreign language. (Henein, *L'esprit frappeur* 142, cited in Antle 9).

⁴² “Whereas art production from the opening of the Cairo School of Fine Arts in 1908 through the 1930s was based on the community of artists in and around the school, the Egyptian surrealists introduced a way of art-making organized around self-identified art groups and articulated manifestos of artistic ideologies

Through the development of these political and ideological spaces for art outside institutional art education the surrealists in Egypt “fundamentally changed the way artists made, exhibited, and circulated art.” (2013, 24) After the surrealism, other collective practices in Egypt developed in their wake, like the Contemporary Art Group and the Modern Art Group which also developed around shared philosophies but were concerned with “a national Egyptian identity, at times in support of the state”. Seggerman links these to the aesthetic representations of the 2011 Egyptian revolution and to their surrealist predecessors, as both movements included two fundamentals pioneered by the surrealists: “a more sustained dialogue with politics, and many artists saw their artwork as a vehicle for social change.” (2013, 24). Henein and his collaborators were not only forerunners in the development of an international arts movement that brought cultural difference to the parallel European movements, they left a marked legacy in the establishment of independent aesthetic spaces for thinking through art and politics in their own national and local art scenes, a space not necessarily dictated nor dominated by institutionalism.

Though often unrecognized in the history of Western art, the Egyptian surrealists made significant interventions into both international surrealism and the local methodology of art making in the modern era. Like Cuban artist Wifredo Lam, who established a new visual language combining African art imagery with cubism and surrealism that reckoned with the issues of post-colonialism after years spent in Europe as Picasso’s protégé, the Egyptian surrealists were both validated by their engagement with the canon of European artists from Surrealist times, but also were at times overshadowed by them.⁴³

rather than solely around painted or sculpted objects. Their idea-based art and writings also allowed Egyptian artists of subsequent generations to engage with the local identity and heritage through more subtle means than their predecessors.” (Seggerman 2013, 1).

⁴³ Baddeley and Fraser’s reading of the intervention of Lam’s work into European Surrealism, particularly into Picasso’s aesthetic which often went unnoticed by traditional readings: “As an archetype of revolutionary modernism, [Picasso] continues to represent the exclusively colonial characteristics of modernity itself. In painterly terms Picasso was often a beneficent colonial explorer, proudly parading the spoils of his conquests. Lam wryly inverts such practices, revealing the cultural politics at the heart of the languages of art. At the same time as traditional appraisals of Lam’s work frequently see no further than the

Lam likened his own subversion of both the art world and larger post-colonial hierarchies to that of a Trojan horse strategy.⁴⁴ Like Lam, many Latin American artists forged their way through this liminal space where they had to contend with the popular interpretations of their culture by other cultures and where their own authenticity and originality was questioned. Baddeley and Fraser describe the position of many artists of the same period in their relationship to surrealism as a symbolic mapping of their past and present necessary to asserting their own aesthetic identity.⁴⁵

Artists like Lam were also concerned with the relationship of art to both an elite and everyday public, a strong current described by Wijdan Ali as part of the self-discovery period she found as a commonality across the art histories of the Arab world. In 1941, the same year Lam described his Trojan strategy in the above interview except, the Egyptian surrealist Kamel El-Telmissany described a similar concern, with his interest in the dividing lines that separated art and class: “In these crucial days of difficulty, the artists in this country live in tall aristocratic towers... For this peasant has an art of his own that sustains him, and it is not that art of the educated class.” (cited in Kane 2010, 95).

There is much evidence that through their words, art, and actions, Surrealist artists of the South brought to the forefront the cultural differences between Ancient art traditions and modern European ones, as they did between publics of different social classes, as they pondered their position within these worlds. But as they entered into the world art system of European domain, they faced a dilemma between the simultaneous erasure and

exotic, the problems addressed by his paintings are masked by an unshakable faith in the unique authenticity of Picasso’s art.” (p 105).

⁴⁴ “I decided that my painting would never be the equivalent of that pseudo-Cuban music for nightclubs. I refused to paint cha-cha-cha. I wanted with all my heart to paint the drama of my country, but by thoroughly expressing the negro spirit, the beauty of the plastic art of the blacks. In this way I could act as a Trojan horse that would spew forth hallucinating figures with the power to surprise, to disturb the dreams of the exploiters. I knew I was running the risk of not being understood either by the man in the street or by the others. But a true picture has the power to set the imagination to work, even if it takes time.” (Fouchet, 1976, 188-9)

⁴⁵ “The pre-conquest past, though often just as alien to their contemporary life as it was to a Parisian avant-garde, constantly served to differentiate Latin American culture from that of Europe. Reference to that past carried with it the implicit awareness of the colonial conflict. Interest in the art of the continent’s ancient inhabitants was not a simple rejection of accepted traditions of representation as it was for artists such as Picasso; it was also an assertion of the special identity of their own culture.” (p. 100)

exaggeration of their own expression, in which even their own authority to speak through aesthetics was questioned.

On the one hand there was a certain validation that came from a serious engagement with European art.⁴⁶ On the other hand, the artists of this generation like Lam and the Chilean Roberto Matta were nonetheless limited by the same hegemonic gaze of Western culture that recognized their talent while oppressing their autonomy by continually seeking to re-organize their position into second-rate artists behind the European cannon. Instead of being recognized for their innovations and critique of European visual languages, they were accused of copying or their art was considered to be a derivative of the great masters instead of a dialogue or critique or expansion of European techniques.⁴⁷

The 1930s and 40s proved to be a time artist groups left their indelible mark on the art scenes and movements of the South, in a way that fused ideas about building modern politics, art and nation. Several important models for collective practice were developed by autonomous groups of artists working at the crossroads of these issues. FIARI presented a political art movement model complete with manifesto, platform, and international ideology of aesthetic resistance. The *Art et Liberté* group expanded this model to include a counter-Eurocentric model of collectivism that employed radical education and radical art ideology as a lens through which to see the limits and divisions of modern society (especially those configured around class, gender and culture, and to a less extent around race). During this time, the muralist movement in Mexico developed a ‘muralista’ model of collective practice: murals of political nature would be created by a

⁴⁶ As Baddeley and Fraser point out, “Surrealism offered the Latin American artist a place at the high table, welcoming proof of the movement’s internationalist aspirations.” (p. 102).

⁴⁷ Perhaps like the Breton’s Orientalist essentialising reading of Baya Mehedienne, both Lam and Matta have been said to have “embodied those aspects of their native culture most admired by the European exponents of Surrealism,” but as art historians have demonstrated, the voices of these artists of the South problematized the colonial gaze present even in the Surrealist imagination. Writing about Lam and Matta’s role as artists who worked within the European Surrealist scenes while creating a legacy for future Latin American artists, Baddeley and Fraser describe this enigma of their accomplishments in the North: “It is ironic that the very process of their acceptance and into that movement simultaneously defused the most explosive components of the two artists’ work, absorbing the specific into the general, transforming the original in the derivative.” (p. 102)

team of people (craftworkers and artists of various fame levels) and signed by one main superstar author (Gallo 2007).

A third model of politics, art and collectivism came about from art groups like the *Taller de Grafica Popular*⁴⁸ of Mexico (est. 1937), which like the literary groups of Francisco Gavidia and Darío from the previous century, were formations of friendship and professional alliances which joined together to jointly theorize the role of art and politics while maintaining separate practices. All of these had in common one element that future generations of collective art practitioners would inherit: the creation of a third space (incorporating local and international traditions and ideas) that was politicized in its aesthetics, yet could change the location of its inspiration for theorization, from school to institution to artist studio, and increasingly in later generations, in the street. Lam, Henein, and their contemporaries marked out a kind of third space with their actions and artworks, creating new art languages that offered critiques of European and local ideologies through using translation and representation as theoretical tools for aesthetics. The center of theorizing through art-making could now not only be located in the academies of fine arts but also into new spaces defined by the first generations of graduates in those schools in the South, who carved out new spheres for theorizing through independent magazines and artist groups. This generation of artists helped make the autonomous artist space a force to be reckoned with, expressed through collective practices that produced exhibitions, magazines and their own visual languages. Through this collective process artists found a way to meld their desires and histories with local and international politics and ideas about national representation and the forces that divided national identity from within. Many in this generation would go on to develop their own schools that were inspired from the linkage of radical aesthetic politics with radical education – these schools were both literal and metaphorical, like Joaquín Torres-García's School of the South described in his 1935 Manifesto. Torres-García wrote the manifesto a year after returning to his native Montevideo after years spent abroad creating art in European scenes. His constructive universalism became his trademark

⁴⁸ public graphic arts workshop

aesthetic between two worlds. A few years later he drew a map, a rough sketch of an inverted South America, (the South pole at the top of the page) that would come to represent/symbolize the idea of a radical Latin American aesthetic of the South in generations to come, with one particularly interesting turn in its rebirth in the 1990s.

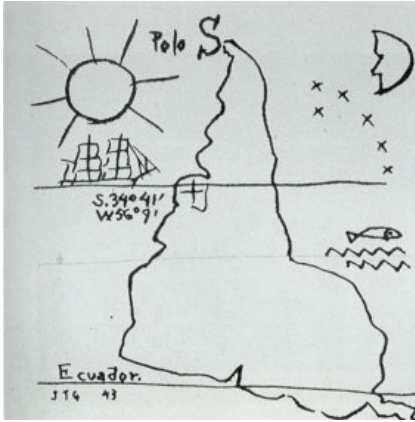


Image 1d and 1e. Joaquín Torres García's *Inverted America* (1943) and Mohammed al-Idrisi's map from his atlas *Tabula Rogeriana* (1154).

Torres García's map is hauntingly like the atlas drawn by Mohammed al-Idrisi's map in 1154, one of the earliest maps to appear in the modern world, which also appears upside-down to a contemporary audience: Africa is shown directly above Europe.⁴⁹

The critiques and counter-discourses proposed by the artist groups of the 1930s and 40s had a lasting effect on the art of future generations, in which there is much evidence of art as an ideological, political expression. Kane describes how this legacy unfolded in the Egypt of the 1950s and 60s, even with the end of the surrealist practices, with the "revival of liberalism as a path for the arts" and a "recentering of the everyday as the preoccupation of art" by a collective called Art Group (2010, 112).⁵⁰

⁴⁹ al-Idrisi's map has been resurrected in 2000s art exhibitions on the aesthetics of the Middle East.

⁵⁰ "From the late 1930s through the mid-1950s, Surrealists engaged in a critique of the basis of the older, classical, romantic view that dominated the production of elite arts. After the repositioning of the state through the Egyptian Revolution in 1952, the position of the arts shifts to a neorealism combining a rhetorical art for the masses along the lines of modified social realism, and private arts for a new elite that could embrace a more reflective combination of realism and abstraction. The solution for this combination

The masses and the street – equal sites of danger and inspiration – would develop into central themes in the art practices of the 1940s, 50s, 60s and 70s, not only in Egypt as Kane describes, but in many other Souths around the world. American artist Gregory Sholette and co-author Stimson propose a periodization of collective practices between 1945 and 1989 characterized by a counterculture caught between socialist and capitalist tendencies, that was directly informed by artist groups of the 1930s and 40s like the Surrealists.⁵¹ Stimson and Sholette ask what the power of such a ghost, or spector, like the one Denning proposes, can impact, inspire and interact with the broader social landscape. Even though many of the Egyptian surrealists were eventually jailed and forgotten, and for the large part written out of both international and local history (as Seggerman documents), their actions and artworks, documented in journals, manifestos and other texts, was part of a hidden and later recovered legacy of ideological art practice that connected collectivity with a broadened conception of how art can represent not only a single identity, but a terrain of multiple identities and affiliations; a theoretical location symbolized by this third space.

The first period examined in this chapter begins with Darío's modernismo in the 1890s and Al Nahda, or Arab renaissance, which began in the late 1800s in Cairo and eventually spreading to the nearby capitals of Beirut and Damascus. Within this period, we can see Wijdan Ali's three stages of modern art unfold (learning, self-discovery and search for identity) across the spaces central to art in the South (the religious institution,

was a revival of liberalism as a path for the arts. After 1952, Surrealism lost its luster and favour but remained in the discourse of its adherents and an influence on a succeeding generation of artists. In Egypt, the Surrealist quest and critique of the arts remained in active practice through the mid-1960s, when a number of key artists died and others faced imprisonment. The Surrealist critique was surpassed by the innovations of the Contemporary Art Group, with its recentring of the everyday as the preoccupation of art." (Kane 2010, 112).

⁵¹ Between 1945 and 1989 culture took on a definite political heft in the undeclared war between capitalism and socialism. And reciprocally, politics took on a cultural cast of its own. From the struggle for civil rights graphically captured in Life magazine, to the surrealist inspired slogans of May 1968, to the emergence of the New Left itself, entwined as it was with an emerging, youthful counterculture, the range of transformations and contradictions making up the presence of the cultural turn was reshaping the everyday lives and struggles of the subaltern classes, and "As a result, the cultural turn raised the specter of a cultural politics, a cultural radicalism, a cultural revolution"; it was a specter, Denning adds, that haunts the period of the cold war." (2007, p. 9, citing Micheal Denning's *Culture in the Age of Three Worlds* (2004).

the fine arts academy, the museum, the cultural journal, the artist movement and collective). This unfolding and juxtaposing of differing aesthetic traditions occurred in ways that did not occur in the North, where multiple art traditions did not contend with each other in the same struggle for territory and dominance. But rather than developing in a linear fashion, these stages and spaces grew like concentric circles, each previous stage and central space giving way to the development and centrality of a new one, but while remaining in the same arts infrastructure. Such that even after religious spaces were not the main art-making centres, they remained part of the larger art scene and continued as arts educational sources without disappearing completely. In a similar fashion, each new stage that Ali describes remained a backdrop that would continue to be refigured with each new generation, as seen in the case of learning European and other art techniques, or the self discovery which Mexican artists went through at each stage of their modern history, from incorporating local landscapes into Academic paintings, to adopting an anti-Spanish position and using Nahuatl symbolism to signify that struggle, to appropriating popular culture traditions as a tool for government critique within murals, while engaging political with international movements like the Surrealists of FIARI.

Art after false night, 1945-1989

False night of war, false night of frenzied provocations that end up ruining all intelligence and all culture in a *volkish* and folkloric chauvinism. False night of slavery and flayed susceptibilities, oh, the time lost in “national hostilities!” False night for real and numerous brigands at all points on the horizon. False night – the ultimate negation of poetry, of the *right* of poetry, of the *poetic sensibility* that humankind has evolved. False night that must be swept away once and for all, so that we shall awaken one morning to find the very air we breath flowering with freedom, this *other* ocean.

Ikbal El Alailly, (translated in Rosemont 194-95, quoted in Seggerman 2013, 17)

Ikbal El Alailly wrote this text in 1945, at the end of World War II, looking ahead to the cultural revelations she hoped would be brought about in this new era after the storm of fascism and Nazi Germany. But for El Alailly and her fellow Surrealists in the Egyptian movement, the ensuing years would become a time of danger and disillusionment, during which many of her contemporaries were jailed. Ties would be cut with FIARI and the French Surrealists, in part due to their disagreement over the creation of Israel and the ensuing Arab-Israeli War. Henein and his contemporaries found it “contradictory for

surrealism, having always fought against the state, might now help form a new one” (Alexandrian quoted in Seggerman 2013, 21). This engagement with the concept of the state would become key, defining the next era and setting into motion a new sphere as centre for art-making. 1945 and the ensuing years marked not only the end of a global catastrophe but a new period of civil unrest and a struggle for new sovereignty, a time in which democracy would become institutionalized through a series of coups, and authoritarian rule along with the creation of democratic parties that would remain in power for prolonged periods of time.⁵²

The Egyptian surrealists fought against the state mechanisms of organized power, but the next generations of artists who created groups like Cairo’s Contemporary Art Group and Modern Art Group, would embrace collaboration with the state in the creation of a new idealistic nationalism.⁵³ As the locus of new art production moved from object to ideology, artists reacted to the intense state-making projects that consumed many nations across the globe. The rise of the new state would become a main catalyst for artistic and national production for this era, and with it would come a new state-backed engagement with national arts and identity expressed through the arts. In addition to the spheres established for artmaking in previous decades (the academy, the artist movement, the manifesto, the journal, the artist group), the state’s interest in art would usher in a new focus on the public arena as a site and inspiration as a new art territory (a theme *Art et Liberté* had already begun to explore in 1930s Egypt). Within this new paradigm of the new state, new public and new street, artists would come to play an increasingly central

⁵² For example, in 1946 the Partido Revolucionario Institucional began a 50 year rule in Mexico; in the same year Lebanon was liberated of British and French troupes signifying an end to colonial rule that would give way to a period of state-making marked by sectarian civil unrest; in 1952 Egypt’s Nasserism period began spawning a series of assassinations and subseccions by vice presidents that would last for 58 years, all the way through to the end of the Mubarak period in 2010; and in El Salvador one of the bloodiest dictatorships would give way to a series of coups beginning in 1944, followed by a twenty-year rule of the National Coalition Party .

⁵³ In contrast to the universalism of their predecessors, these new groups were concerned with the visualizing of a national identity even as they inherited the methodology of *Art et Liberte* and it’s desire for art-making that fused aesthetics with art ideologies and local politics (a much more ideological search for the combination of local Southern context and international Northern art trends that was expressed through object-making in the previous generations of artists whose locus of activity was the fine arts academy) (Seggerman 24).

role in the development and institutionalisation of the new visual languages to represent these new spaces. When *Art et Liberté* disbanded, its members became their successors. Groups like the Contemporary Art Group and their contemporaries became the protagonists of these ever-expanding spheres, even as the ex-members of *Art et Liberté* became enemies of the state during this period, jailed or forced into exile for their political work; no longer supported due to their anti-fascist stance but instead persecuted them towards the end of WWII. This was a changing tide not unique to Cairo alone, but one felt by artists across many Southern cities responding to the state's increased interest in funding and nation-making through public art that artists in the years after 1944.⁵⁴ Throughout the 1940s and 50s the increasing new institutionalism continued to dominate the public consciousness through its visualisation of nationalism in the South.⁵⁵ Artists were increasingly provided with government grants to study abroad in Europe, and they continued the tradition of transnational art methodology by mixing international avant-garde movements with a new quest to represent Salvadoran memory (Bahamond 171). As this quest became incorporated into the institutionalizing processes of the new state (as did almost every area of the arts and culture), the artist associations of the 1930s became

⁵⁴ Jessica Winegar presents some findings on Egyptian artist collectives of the 1940s and 1950s, placing them within a genealogy of Egyptian art and an era in which collectivism in the arts was used to explore the tradition/modernity axis, and within in that issues like Pan-Arab nationalism in the Nasser era, or the incorporation of Islamic calligraphy into modern art. One example is the Group of Art and Life, with its mission to connect art with the local milieu, including craft and spirituality.

⁵⁵ In Mexico this happened through the *mestizaje* movement of *la raza cósmica*, and took place among differing and competing definitions of *mestizaje*, its purpose and the role of indigeneity in the fashioning of a new official version of national history and its necessarily arbitrary re-working of time.⁵⁵ For many countries in Latin America, like El Salvador, the political and public nature of the Mexican mural program became a national model of engagement with the arts. Like many other Souths in this period, El Salvador entered a tumultuous quest for democracy and new state-building, after a series of military coups and yearnings for democracy that went hand-in-hand with aesthetic identity-building projects. The end of the General Hernández Martínez dictatorship in 1944, a caudillo who carried out one of the bloodiest national tragedies with the massacre of 30,000 rural Salvadorans in 1932 during his thirteen-year rule, murdering and instilling fear of genocide as retaliation against an uprising of indigenous farmers led by communist guerrilla leader Farabundo Martí (who was later commemorated in the main leftist political party, Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) that is still in existence today and was in power at the time of the field research I conducted for this thesis with artist collectives in San Salvador). The fall of the Martínez dictatorship was followed by a series of coups and an unstable political history, during which time, nonetheless, the state began identity building projects, some of them modelled after Mexico and its public art scheme.

government-funded cultural agencies of the 1950s,⁵⁶ and the government became a curator of artists who were put on the state payroll to create public works translating into public visual consciousness the state's search for memory and national time.

The state encouraged national pride through art that incorporated ancient symbols and local culture unique to the region, and funded many artworks and schools that promoted this view of art as a instrument that could be used for the construction of a nationalist state in the popular imagination, around unifying concepts like pan-Arabism of Nasser's Egypt, for example, or the 1920s-50s Mexican government's version of *mestizaje* and the 'raza cosmica'. Indeed, the state became the largest patron of the arts during the Nasser era that began in 1954 (Seggerman 22). Often, the two forces of the state and the wealthy private art patrons were not in direct opposition; members of elite families who were interested in art often worked in conjunction with the state, as representatives, lobbyists and funders. These nationalist projects had negative and positive implications for indigenous traditions and histories, which remained largely marginalized as relics relegated to the past, even if made visible (either ignored or managed by national ideologies and policy). In Latin America, the reality of a huge indigenous presence in modern national life was rendered invisible, as blood, exploitation and fear flowed through the countryside even as peasant rituals and native symbols from the ruins were eulogized in urban public spaces. In the Arab world, as the socialism of the Nasser period gained currency with its message of pan-Arabism, artists pondered the new role art might play in crossing the growing rifts between social classes at the end of the monarchical rule and colonial occupation; they pondered the modernization of the new state art in relation to Islamic and Ancient art traditions as they dialogued with aesthetic trends from their European neighbors in the North.

⁵⁶ For example, the 1930s artist's association *Asociacion de Amigos del Arte* in San Salvador became nationalised and institutionalised as the government-funded *Casa de Cultura* in the 1950s (Bahamond 171), signifying a deepening national perspective of the arts as cultural patrimony and container of national memory, a kind of national cultural resource that proved lucrative with the ensuing boom of Salvadoran war art in the 1980s.

The willing engagement of artists with the institutionalization processes of state-making of the 1940s and 50s was followed by a period of critical movements that swept across the globe in the late 1950s and 1960s, desiring to change the state's conception of its subject, the citizen, with platforms that focused on working towards equality for diverse citizens, especially those ignored or rendered invisible by laws that accorded full rights to only one profile of citizen (which was in most cases male, wealthy, heterosexual and light-skinned). Separate movements in both the South and North rallied around the concept of the personal as political, and sought to carve out a space for diverse citizens within a national legislation that would take into account the diverse personal experiences of the majority of the citizens who did not fit the state's profile. Unlike the Surrealists, the artist-activists of this period were not totally opposed to the state – instead, they believed that change was possible, and continued engaging with national politics and identities through from a more critical stance than the artists of the 1940s and 50s who were preoccupied with presenting a national language in somewhat accordance with the ideology of the state. Many of the themes that were central to the Egyptian surrealist groups were taken up by artists working collectively in almost every city affected by the events of the late 1960s: a need for radical education as an art form, concern with class division and the masses, and an aversion to Eurocentric elitism. The 1960s-70s were at time of upheaval, activism & art, citizen building instead of nation –building, and this politicization led to an influx of social interest in art, that led to social practice in art, social activism and citizen building or citizenship through art. The jump from modernity to contemporaneity in the history of art in both Latin America and the Arab world were defined by a politicization and greater concern for the relationship of artists to the general public, and ran parallel to local political and social contexts that, like almost everywhere in the world were going through revolution. Artworks of this period – conceptual, social, activist, political, collective and often moving trans-locally between the inside space of the gallery and outside public space of the street – contain within them a registry of the events that led to a deep transformation of contemporary national history as experienced from diverse perspectives.

Between 1967 and 1968, a series of politicized events occurred around the world, bringing activism to the forefront of the public sphere and influencing the collective formations art would adopt in the 1970s. These separate revolutionary events reveal a larger systemic critique: “one of the great formative events in the history of our modern world-system,” according to American sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein (1989, p.431). At the heart of the 1968 resistance movements was a questioning of “the fundamental strategy of social transformation” which was manifested in protests and rebellions organized around four common axes: “protest of US hegemony in the world, a critique of the ineffectiveness of “old Left” movements, countercultural sensibilities, an emphasis on the centrality of “minority” groups and women”(McCaughan 6). By this reading, 1968 can be seen as a symbolic beginning point for radical re-conceptualizing of the world-wide social structures that would become globalization, and the beginning of the de-centering of the North and its US/Eurocentrism, at least conceptually if not practically. The fusion of art and politics (in social movements, cultural expression, and collective consciousness) flourished after 1968 in many sites around the world, and particularly in the large cities of the South. In Mexico City, the 1970s (and to some extent the 80s) was a very politicized time to be making art; many artists who had become politicized in the 1968 student movement developed theoretical-political collective practices as part of the *grupos* movement -- artist groups who fused conceptual art and other new genre-style expressions with activism and social critique (McCaughan 7; Rodríguez 2013, 10). The 1970s across Latin America have been characterized by a commitment, with “artists investment in networking was an alternative to local forms of state and military repression that also sought to circumvent the triumphalism of the official Western account of artistic individualism and subjectivity” (Kemp-Welch and Freire 4).

Collectivism & Los Grupos (1970s Mexico City)

A new kind of political art collectivism developed across the large cities of the South, notably in Mexico City with the development of a series of collectives who were later

referred to as ‘*Los Grupos*’.⁵⁷ Like generations of collectives before them, many were interested in merging art, transnational ideologies, and local socio-political concerns.

Art scholar Rubén Gallo traces the story of collectivism in Mexican art through the country’s political history from just before the 1910 Mexican revolution (revolution, dictatorships, rebels, government-funded murals, artist collectives), focusing his argument on the tension between the collective and the individual, with the author as the main protagonist in this story.⁵⁸ His discussion of the 1930s group TGP (Taller de Gráfica Popular) locates in the past the kind of artist group in which individual artists get together to discuss politics and art, but author their works separately. He contrasts this kind of collectivity with the great muralists (who signed works as an individual artist, although they were actually collaborations between many craftspeople and artists) and with the 1970s Mexico City based collectives known as ‘*los grupos*’, who collectively authored many pieces, often using performance, installation and other new art genres. He posits that groups like SUMA, Tetraedro, and Taller de Arte e Ideología (TAI),⁵⁹ and Proceso Pentágono (among the dozens of other groups), used collectivism as both a practical and political strategy.⁶⁰ Often using the street as their gallery and stage, they paired art and activism as part of the larger vision of a new, more equal society.

Focusing his analysis on one group, *Proceso Pentágono*,⁶¹ and its famous protagonist, artist Felipe Ehrenberg, Gallo extrapolates three themes from the group’s collective practice: “the celebration of the street, the focus on information, and the Trojan-horse strategy of institutional critique.” (ibid, 187). He explains this preoccupation with the street (and it’s panorama of audiences, objects and rhythms) as a generational phenomenon expressed by all of the artists collectives of this generation in the Mexican

⁵⁷ *The groups*

⁵⁸ Rubén Gallo, “The Mexican Pentagon: Adventures in Collectivism during the 1970s,” in *Collectivism After Modernism: The Art of Social Imagination After 1945*, ed. Blake Stimson and Gregory Sholette (U of Minnesota Press, 2007).

⁵⁹ Art and Ideology Workshop

⁶⁰ ibid, 167.

⁶¹ Pentagon Process

capital. In opposition to the silence of the empty museum gallery, this positioning was a way for artists to collectively express political and social desires. He also reads their movement between inside and outside, (i.e., from museum to street and back again), as a back-and-forth trans-movement in direct response to the urbanising of Mexico City, which began in the 1940s and led to social isolation felt in the 1970s. By this time a large portion of the city's social public spaces had been replaced with high-speed highways and high rise panopticon-like housing projects.⁶² Here, Gallo brings up two interesting points in his analysis on *Proceso Pentágono*. He describes the direction of this particular collective's action as opposite to those of the majority of art activists around the world who felt they had to leave the museum and not return.⁶³ Pentágono instead returned back to the museum with information they had gained from the street (e.g. human rights abuses, documents of corrupt government practices), and re-inserted this information back into the Art-institution in covert Trojan-horse style. They managed this through politicised artworks and actions of dissidence (in biennials, museums, and state-sponsored festivals).⁶⁴

Gallo's analysis is ripe with resistance narratives like these, (e.g., the government against the people, the groups against the state and the art establishment), although these are complicated by his desire to tie the relevance of the groups actions to the larger Eurocentric canon of contemporary art thinking, which comes across as though they needed somehow to be tied to the canon to be valid expressions of art worthy of inclusion in a larger global art history. The story Gallo tells of art history reflecting the tension of

⁶² Gallo compares this process, which began in the 1950s, of Mexico City becoming a "generic city" by Rem Koolhaas's definition: neighborhoods isolated by highways and characterized by the death of the public space of the street (p.173), citing the work of architect Mario Pani whose projects played a big role in this transformation.

⁶³ While applying this idea to a Mexican context, Gallo cites ideas about collectivism and social practice from Gregory Sholette and Lucy Lippard. Gallo cites Gregory Sholette's essay "News from Nowhere: Activist Art and After, A Report from New York City," *Third Text* 45 (1998-99): 45-62, in which he writes: "The only avenue perceived to be open to those who would pursue a politically engaged art was one that led directly out of the museum."

⁶⁴ Lucy Lippard uses the idea of the Trojan horse to speak about activist art in Lucy R. Lippard, "Trojan Horses: Activist Art and Power," in *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation*, ed. Brian Wallis and Marcia Tucker, Reprint edition (New York; Boston: David R Godine, 1992).

collectivity vs. individuality from a national, political, and urban history is strikingly male; void of any lens of gender anywhere in his study of los Grupos. Not a single female artist is mentioned in his recounting of the organising of Mexican artists from 1910 to 1980, although many women existed and organised collectively during this time period. Gallo does not mention the female members of Proceso Pentágono, not even Lourdes Grobet,⁶⁵ who is often cited as an important member of the group by other art historians⁶⁶ and male members of the same group.⁶⁷ This undeniably male perspective of entwined art and city history, though unexamined as such by Gallo, reveals the power historians still hold in the ability to write certain characters out of history and leave them in the margins of invisibility (even, as in this case, when creating a margin within a margin).

The collective actions and artworks of Los Grupos created conceptual wrinkles in the logic of the state's version of time, a hegemonic version of national time that had been orchestrated to smooth over the inequalities of its citizens and their diverse histories, with the dissemination of Vasconcelos la raza and its cosmos, largely through art (public murals) and education (standardised across the state). This refashioning of national time occurred in the period of democracy-building throughout the countries described in this thesis. In many cases, indigenous identity became relegated to the past, and despite the movements of the 1960s and 70s, the state preferred to ignore the activism, art and social change occurring among the contemporary indigenous populations. Those dealing with the most extreme poverty in each South were also treated with indifference by state policy, and remained largely invisible even after brief moments of visibility through protest and riots.⁶⁸ In the field of art history, artists of these Souths were also curiously

⁶⁵ Lourdes Grobet is mentioned in Gallo's essay, but not as a member of Proceso Pentágono. Instead, her name appears in small font as the photographer of several images of the group's performances (180, 182).

⁶⁶ Mónica Mayer, Rosa Chillante, *Mujeres Y Performance En Mexico* (Mexico City: Conaculta-Fonca, 2004), 19; Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México Museo Universitario de Ciencias y Arte, *La era de la discrepancia: The Age of discrepancies* (Turner, Ediciones S.A., 2006), 220.

⁶⁷ Victor Muñoz, "Lourdes Grobet. Photography and Environment,," Artist Website, Lourdes Grobet, accessed November 13, 2014, http://www.lourdesgrobet.com/lourdes_grobet_victor_en.htm.

⁶⁸ What would soon be referred to at the 'subaltern' in the developing field of post colonial studies was cemented in the 60s and 70s as those with the least access to power, who were rendering invisible, and as Gayatri Spivak would point out, left without a voice in the national and international public sphere.

included in this group – even the most privileged elite who were renowned in local scenes and capital cities of the South, as were Henein and Julia Alvarez, among thousands of others, were not recognized as contributors to a modern or even contemporary art. Time was also reordered in this version of art history, which chose only to see the ancient traditions of the South as part of art history, erasing from the cannon and even from the margins the decades of aesthetic languages developed by artists across the South. It was only fifty or sixty years later that historians began to recover the details of these stories, often even forgotten on a local or national level⁶⁹. For example, during many years the modern artist from Egypt and Lebanon was rendered invisible by formal art history that was taught as universal, through the publication of widely circulating texts, curriculum, (and these continue to be taught continues to be taught in many places as universal). There is a passage about the aesthetic choices of Egyptian artists included E.H. Gombrich's well-known introductory classic, *The Story of Art*, first published in 1950 and last revised and expanded in 1989. "It is obvious that an Egyptian artist," he writes, "had little opportunity of expressing his personality. The rules and conventions of his style were so strict that there was very little scope for choice." Gombrich does not elaborate further, but later in his sections on Egyptian art, it becomes clear that he is speaking of the ancient Egyptian artist, an image of Arab identity, as Said has pointed out, that is frozen in time from hundreds of years prior. This vantage point that does not see the modern Egyptian artist, and cannot even conceive of her existence through the decades, is a perspective still alive in art curriculums and art history of the North that still is promoted as universal. Artists from many Souths had to deal with the threat of erasure from a history that either did not see them or sought to illegitimize their vision and style as imposters, accusing them of imitating the European cannon and incapable of designing their own visual languages (Baddeley and Fraser).

1978 to 1989: The New Orientalism of Post Colonial Times

⁶⁹ In one example of many, Seggerman writes that the Egyptian surrealists and their importance were still barely acknowledged on a local level in state institutions, even in the 2000s.

Edward Said published a new radical paradigm of Orientalism almost a decade after the revolutionary actions which took place in many sites around the world in 1968. In 1978, he famously proposed the move from physical borders to “imaginary geography,” just as a widespread reckoning with the politics of representation that was to occupy the next several decades of critical thought. It flipped the notion of Eurocentric Orientalist painting and culture, heretofore considered a legitimate academic field and founding element of the first fine arts academies in the Middle East. With one essay, Said discredited the entire field of Orientalism, revealing the underlying fantasy of self and other that was so necessary in the development pseudo-scientific European colonial thought.

Said’s critical art theorizing brought radical epistemological change to disciplines across the humanities and social sciences, from art history to anthropology. *Orientalism* (1978) caused a revolution within academic thought and the culture world, by naming the othering that took place through the projection of European fears and fantasies onto an imaginary cultural other, an Arab other whose scientific development challenged that of Europe as an intellectual equal to be feared, and therefore positioned in opposition to European rationalism and relegated to the past, as was indigenous time, science and logic in Latin America. A genre of works that was once seen as an accurate depiction of Arab culture, with its fantasy world of harems, slaves, and dangerous, virile rulers, became widely recognized as an exaggerated, distorted, even imagined view of the other. This invented image coded with regional stereotypes came out of a particular moment in the history of colonization and European fear of the Ottoman Empire, but long after that moment ended, it became a generalized way of seeing contemporary Arab cultures through the lens of exoticism, limiting them to a perspective that fixed Arab culture in an ancient world outside of modernity.

Said published the first version of *Orientalism* while he was teaching at Columbia University in 1978, writing from the position of exile and diaspora, two concepts that

would become central to the development of identity politics and the idea of post colonialism.⁷⁰ These in turn would become two of the most salient issues in contemporary art writing of the South in the 1980s and 90s, and Said's successful re-branding of Orientalism would become the cornerstone of a paradigm shift which would continue to define a re-thinking of world geography through the following century.

In 1985, as a young comparative literature scholar from India who had become an academic in the United States, published "Can the Subaltern Speak?". Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak emphasized the sound of representation (or lack of it), bridging the concepts of voice and indigeneity. In her interventionist-Marxist-feminist mediation into European theory and the wider academic sphere in general, she critiqued Deleuze and Foucault for limiting the knowable subject to a Western European context, while suggesting ways Derridian theory could be used to imagine a subject through a philosophical perspective rather than one limited by socio-political, cultural and historical contexts. In her foundational essay, which developed into a lens for the indigenous in contemporary scholarship that influenced thousands of scholars across the disciplines (Morris 11), Spivak illustrated the subaltern position with a diagram. It showed a cultural hierarchy in India, in which the subaltern is represented by a woman "removed from all lines of social mobility"; she is blocked from having a voice in the public, political, social or cultural realm by virtue of her position at the bottom of a socio-economic and racial hierarchy, below the dominant indigenous groups at regional, local, and national levels, and below the dominant foreign groups (many of which claim to speak for her). The main point of her argument was built around the concept of silence created by representation. Just as the Orientalist painters had rendered the real everyday voices of the Arab world mute to European audiences when they claimed to speak for the Arab world, Spivak demonstrated how generations of academics tried to make the subaltern visible by speaking for her. Even though both academics and humanitarian aid efforts have tried to do so, "you can't simply make the subaltern visible or lend her a voice." (Spivak

⁷⁰ Said has said that this critique was also grounded in his experiences growing up as the son of Palestinian parents, educated in elite British and American schools in Jerusalem and Cairo.

2010). Instead, Spivak proposes that only infrastructural change can allow the subaltern access to voice in the public sphere, or inversely, such systemic change could allow academia to hear the voice of the subaltern.

The multidisciplinary evolution of the idea of post colonialism in the 1980s focused particularly on the body, identity, history, feminism, agency – and on how these operated within two contexts outside the national containers of territory and identity: the border and the diaspora. “A theory in the flesh means one where the physical realities of our lives — our skin color, the land or concrete we grew up on, our sexual longings — all fuse to create a politic born of necessity,” Cherrie Moraga wrote, inhabiting this kind of personal and political border theorizing in *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (p. 23). The claiming of terrain of the body and nation were undoubtedly central in many practices across the 1980s global South. In San Salvador the trend of ‘war art’ dominated the 1980s, a time when commercial galleries flourished with the demand for ‘souvenir’ art by a foreign audience who wanted to buy the paintings of Salvadoran artists who used red and black to express existential inconformity and spiritual alienation in response to the country’s bloody internal conflict of almost thirty years. The long civil war in Beirut during the same period has been described by historians as producing an opposite affect with a surge of art production artists were either fleeing or coping with the terrors of war (Karnouk 9). In Mexico, a predilection for post-modern kitsch arose, sometimes called ‘neo-Mexicanism’. The concept of kitsch also found currency with Egyptian art historians like Lilane Karnouk, who described this era as a ‘kitsch wave’ in which religious art, popular symbolism and mass-produced cultural objects played a role in the imagery of visual culture of the capital and many kinds of art produced in this era.

From Cage to Archive: Critiquing the system from 1989 – 2000

Like the momentous events of 1967-8, the year 1989 was a year of radical change in the socio-political system, and of art's role in that system. In El Salvador⁷¹ and Lebanon⁷², it was the beginning of the end of a long civil war and an entrance into a postwar period of mirrored violence, a time when artists from each place became internationally recognized for their uncommon reflections upon the persistence of conflict even after the so-called end of the war. As the post-war period developed, artists in El Salvador developed an aesthetic language that included conceptual artworks responding to social issues and problems that arose in this era, and with the absence of color, an aesthetic they named 'el blanco violento.' Meanwhile, a core group of internationally recognized artists developed, violence and a security crisis continued to erupt along the dividing lines of the city as control was transferred from the hands of warring paramilitary groups to warring gangs, after the peace accords were signed in 1992. The country remained divided by both violent gang territories and the socio-economic class divide; by 1989, so widespread was the theft of countryside land belonging to the poor rural population, that the oligarchy (1% of the population) had usurped 41% of the farmable land. 60% of the countryside residents were left without land, mostly poor and indigenous farmers.

⁷¹ 1989 was the first year of the Cristiani presidency of the Arenal political party, a landmark in a timeline that would set off the events that led to the end of the war. Reacting to the possibility of a rigged election that had put Cristiani in power, the rival political party FMLN started a campaign that brought the violence of war to the elite Salvadoran population (for the first time not only affecting the poor). The attack brought assassinations and violence all the way to high ranking political and military officials. At the start of 1990, UN Peace negotiations began, eventually leading to the signing of an agreement between Arenal and FMLN that then developed into the 1992 peace accords that finally marked the official end of the war. (Montgomery 1995).

⁷² In 1989 the Taif Agreement was signed in Lebanon as the first step to ending the civil war. Religious, sectarian, and state militias continued fighting until 1990 when the Taif agreement was put into effect, and finally in 1992, the first parliamentary elections to be held in twenty years took place. For an outline and detailed explanation of the war timeline, see <http://www.ghazi.de/civwar.html>

In Beirut, artists who experienced the violent civil war and mass exodus of close to a million, began to develop new conceptual art tendencies that dealt critically with the insufficiency of state and international structures to document and memorialize a war that never seemed to end. After the peace accords that were put into action in 1990, the assassinations, assaults, and on occasion bombings continued, as did the divided factions of secular and religious communities. The Lebanese oligarchy—approximately 1% of the total population and 1,000 families – was reorganized after the war to increase wealth to an even smaller group, and openly conduct business through a familial model. The new system of the elite, called the ‘consortium of families’ by economist Fawwaz Traboulsi, was based around holding companies as the new form of capital ownership that permitted the wealthiest families to diversify their businesses into different sectors of the economy, while operating openly as companies of a familial nature and restricting membership into the country’s ruling elite (Traboulsi 1994, 32-37). In Lebanon, as in El Salvador, artists who were finding new ways to speak about the war and the ongoing violence of poverty were largely from this elite upper class.

During the time between 1989 and 2015 there were also a series of art booms in the cities and art regions of this study. Latin American art experienced a boom in the 1980s global art marketing, with the foreign interest in primitive-inspired art, magical realism⁷³ and kitsch. The work of the late Mexican artist Frida Kahlo broke sales records, and she became a global art icon even bigger than her husband, Diego Rivera. The ‘war art’ boom

⁷³ The term magical realism (used to refer to Latin American literature in 1955 by Puerto Rican literary critic Angel Flores), like primitivism, emphasized indigenous traditions and mythology while maintaining their belonging to the primitive, cute or naïve art category, the kind of primitive conception of the Other’s imagination, used to describe Mahieddine. In his 1955 essay “Magical Realism in Spanish American Fiction”, Flores used the term to describe a fusion of two previously suggested terms – “marvelous realism” and “magic realism” (the latter used to describe a genre of both art and literature related to surrealism and ‘uncanny realism’ from Venezuela, Germany and the US). For a discussion on the roots and early use of this term, see Maggie Ann Bowers’s book *Magic(al) Realism*. New York: Routledge (2004). Gerardo Mosquera wrote of the critical responses to these movements offered by Latin American and Latino historians and critics, in books like *Beyond the Fantastic* (1995). Making reference to the Spanish Colombian art historian Marta Traba, in the introduction to this anthology, he describes a counter-current of theorizing against the linearity of modernity, the idea of the third world, the primitive, the magical realism, and kitsch interpretations of contemporary art made in Latin America.

in El Salvador occurred on a much more local level – even though many of the buyers were international, they purchased Salvadoran art in the country as a souvenir from the war-time period. In the 1990s, a generation of Mexican artists, many whom lived and worked in Mexico City, became international stars, of the first were Gabriel Orozco, Damian Ortega, and Francis Alys, and Teresa Margolles, though many more followed. They captivated the world with their poetic conceptual pieces that many commented did not ‘look Mexican’ or evoke the Mexican identity of the 1980s Latin American art boom. Cuahtémoc Medina described the new 1990s art as a “move away from identity politics whether it be couched with the language of nationalist rhetoric or the more palpable anthropological discourses of recent years,” as Colombian art historian Michele Faguet noted (Faguet 2001, 126). Medina described a tendency of Mexico City art practices as related to the social positioning of the artists, who moves away from the role of “someone who expresses something to somebody,” and instead takes on a new role, “in favor of the contrary notion of the artist as someone who signals his astonishment at the circulation of meanings.” (Medina quoted in Faguet 2001, 126). And while the 1990s Mexican generation of artists continued to bring in large sales and garner international acclaim with exhibitions and European gallery representation, the undoubted new stars of 2000s would come from Lebanon. The generation nicknamed the new ‘Beirut school of art’ would captivate the art world with their parafictional takes on archive, ethnography and collective practices, most famously inaugurated into the global art world by the Walid Raad’s, Atlas Group project would travel the world in such big name exhibitions as Documenta and X, eventually coming to represent the rise of the post-colonial global South on the world stage. Akram Zaatari, Joana Hadjithomas & Khalil Joreige, Lamia Joreige and Rabih Mroué, also made art world headlines with the re-occurring themes in their work that revolved around “coming to terms with the aftermath of the Civil War and an interest in individual and collective history, memory and amnesia, the archival, and the politics of representation (after disaster).” (Muller 2014). By 2010, another wave of international interest in Central American contemporary art had brought about the rise of several Salvadoran art stars, following the first time Central American artists began to be included and recognized in the Venice Biennale with the Gold Lion Award for Young

Artist: Federico Herrero of Costa Rica (2001), Aníbal López of Guatemala (2001) and Regina José Galindo, also of Guatemala (2005). According to some historians, these wins marked an important legitimization of art from the Central American Isthmus (Villena Fiengo 2014, 131).

The artists of these boom periods have been included in other historicizations of art, most commonly by historians working from a Northern perspective, who see their work and role in the larger story of art in radically different ways. For example, in her book on participatory art British art historian Claire Bishop calculates that the current of a ‘social turn’ in the global art world can be tracked to 1917, 1968 and 1989. Some of the themes she outlines in the changing nature of social art, are indeed, very relevant to the concerns of the art stars of this period, and played a role in shaping the currents surrounding their practices.⁷⁴

Bishop sees participatory art practice in direct relation to the rise and fall of socio-political movements, placing the idea of social art informed by political upheaval and social movements as having arisen in the time period discussed in this chapter. She defends her opinion by recognizing that her expertise is limited to a Western European position, for which she gives a political and social context, but ironically she includes and evaluates many artworks from the global South from the very first example in her text (Alfredo Jaar’s *Camera Lucida* 1996, in Caracas), and throughout the remaining chapters of the book. She includes many Latin American case studies, with examples of artists working in Venezuela, Chile, Argentina, Brazil, and Cuba (the latter which she mistakenly includes as part of her description and evidence on the area she names South America, p. 1-2). Following a Eurocentric perspective engrained in art history, she does

⁷⁴ “From a Western European perspective, the social turn in contemporary art can be contextualized by two previous historical moments, both synonymous with political upheaval and movements for social change: the historic avant-garde in Europe circa 1917, and the so-called ‘neo’ avant-garde leading to 1968. The conspicuous resurgence of participatory art in the 1990s leads me to posit the fall of communism in 1989 as a third point of transformation. Triangulated, these three dates form a narrative of the triumph, heroic last stand and collapse of a collectivist vision of society. Each phase has been accompanied by a utopian rethinking of art’s relationship to the social and of its political potential – manifested in a reconsideration of the ways in which art is produced, consumed, and debated.” (Bishop 2012, 3).

not attempt any in-depth or critical examination of theory, socio-political context or history from the South to accompany a description of the artworks from these contexts. Instead, she fits them into a timeline based upon a Western European view of world politics and art thinking from Europe and North America. This un-critical view of artists and movements from the South, as necessarily fitting into the centre Art History as peripheral side notes and examples of the expansion of European art tendencies, reflects the unabashed Eurocentrism of art history narratives from the previous century, dating back at least to Orientalism. It is against this grain that both critical art theories from the South developed, as well as critical artworks by artists from both the South in the North and the Global South of the 1990s. They address the need for a deeper system change both in the way art is viewed, interpreted and related to region.

The 1990s: Inside the Cage

In the spring of 1992, in London's Covent Gardens, artists Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gómez-Peña put their own bodies on display inside a large metal cage. They disguised themselves in sunglasses and neo-indigenous costumes (Mexican wrestler mask, plastic grass skirt, face paint, shiny Aztec dancer loin-cloth and headdress, braided wig).⁷⁵ It was part of a performance piece they called *Two Undiscovered Amerindians*, one they would take around the world to present in museums and public spaces. The guards hired by the artists to watch over the cage announced to the public that these were two people from the lost island of Guatanaui, on view as part of a "500 year tradition of displaying indigenous people in cages started by Christopher Columbus." (Heredía and Fusco 1997). Touring Europe and the Americas with the work from 1992 to 1994, they chose sites like Covent Gardens where indigenous people had been exhibited 200 years earlier (from the

⁷⁵ The neo-indigenous was a defining theme in the 1990s, addressed in diverse artistic practices by artists with roots in the South, though few expressions were as radical and controversial as this one. Other examples include an artist-run organisation from 1990s Cairo called the Asala Collective for Heritage Arts and Contemporary Arts, which employed the strategy of combining knowledges from local art traditions with those from foreign art traditions, mainly modernism from Europe (Winegar 2006).

17th century and early 19th century (Johnson 1993, 2).⁷⁶ Their intent was to “create a satirical commentary on Western concepts of the exotic” in the form of a year-long performance they titled *Year of the White Bear*, in which they voiced an alternative perspective on colonialisation against the backdrop of the Columbus Quincentennial celebrations in the US and Europe, which celebrated Colombus’s so-called ‘discovery’ of America and the resulting 500 years of oppression of native people.

Through the metal bars, the guards fed Fusco and Gómez-Peña bananas, and put them on leashes to take them out of the cage to use the toilet. The Guatinauis “performed” for the crowd for a small fee: posing for pictures, telling stories in a nonsensical language, dancing and even displaying the genitals of the “male Guatinaui specimen”. And the audience “performed” for the artists: tourists, museum-goers, and passers-by were interviewed for a documentary produced by the artists, in which they revealed their reflections and opinions upon viewing this couple in the cage. Some jeered, others asked if it was a farce, but to the surprise of the artists, a large number believed the Guatinauis real. Fusco noted, many “white Americans and Europeans spent hours speculating in front of us about how we could possibly run a computer, own sun-glasses and sneakers, and smoke cigarettes.” Witnessing these ordinary objects of everyday modern life, they must have felt what Michele Faguet calls a “sense of critical estrangement” (2001, p. 124), akin to James Clifford’s concept of the ethnographic surreal, “whereby the familiar is made to appear strange, thus revealing the “artificial codes... [and] ideological identities” through which identities are actively constructed.” (Clifford 1988 cited in Faguet 125).

What Fusco and Gómez-Peña did not expect is that their art world peers would criticize

⁷⁶ The performance was titled “The Couple in the Cage: Two Undiscovered Amerindians” (1991-1992) and the year-long series of repeated performances of this work was titled *The Year of the White Bear* (1991-1992). The tour included Covent Gardens, Orange County, California; Walker Art Center; Whitney Biennial, NYC; and the grand rotunda of the National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, in Washington, D.C. A documentary of the works, *The Couple in the Cage* (1993) was directed by Paula Heredia and co-produced by Fusco and Gómez-Peña.

them for “misinforming the public,” with an artwork that quickly broadened from a historical critique of Eurocentrism into an institutional critique of the art-institution and “public faith in museums as bastions of truth” (Fusco 144). In a 1994 academic essay on performance, “The Other History of Intercultural Performance,” Fusco reflected on the crisis of viewing reflected in the various audiences who either took offense at *The Couple in the Cage* or behaved offensively. She drew a connection between the myth and history of primitivism, and contemporary identity politics from the 90s, drawing from Kafka’s depiction of the racialized other. Fusco is not using the formulaic model of “North-theory/South-example”, rather, she references Kafka as a way to talk about a European phenomena of anthropological othering that turned people into animals; her critique is an intervention similar to the critiques of whiteness which emerged in the 1990s as well. She invites her readers to consider her performance in the cage through “the irony of having to demonstrate one’s humanity,” in the context of a systemic and violent European tradition, illuminated through Kafka’s 1900s story of “the testimony of a man from the Gold Coast of Africa who had lived for several years on display in Germany as a primate.” (p.161) ⁷⁷

Fusco and Gómez Peña’s work engendered several themes that concerned many artists from the Global South during the 1990s: an engagement with critical race theory, the legacy of anthropology and the critical paradigm of otherness encapsulated in the work of Kafka (which inspired the use of the term ‘minor literature’ in Deleuze and Guattari’s essay on Kafka, a term that would become widespread in Latin American art criticism in

⁷⁷ “In the early 1900s, Franz Kafka wrote a story that began, “Honored members of the Academy! You have done me the honor of inviting me to give your Academy an account of the life I formerly led as an ape” (1979: 245). Entitled “A Report to an Academy,” it was presented as the testimony of a man from the Gold Coast of Africa who had lived for several years on display in Germany as a primate. That account was fictitious and created by a European writer who stressed the irony of having to demonstrate one’s humanity; yet it is one of many literary allusions to the real history of ethnographic exhibition of human beings that has taken place in the West over the past five centuries. While the experiences of many of those who were exhibited is the stuff of legend, it is the accounts by observers and impresarios that comprise the historical and literary record of this practice in the West. My collaborator Guillermo Gómez-Peña and I were intrigued by this legacy of performing the identity of an Other for a white audience, sensing its implications for us as performance artists dealing with cultural identity in the present. Had things changed, we wondered? How would we know, if not by unleashing those ghosts from a history that could be said to be ours?” (Fusco 274).

the next decades). A key element that artists like Fusco introduced into the art world was the sense of agency that an artist could play in the role of social production of race and identity. In the *Couple in the Cage*, the artists produced a new subject both inside and outside the hegemonic structure of race and indigeneity, of region and power. The Guatinaui characters were both reifying and subverting the European gaze on the indigenous body. They presented their audience with an inverse experience of the man forced to live as an ape in Kafka's fiction, through ritualizing a violent history of oppression, and inserting it into their present vernacular of visual culture, which had already commodified indigenous identity from the past. At first glance, the two people in the performance were encaged, subjected to sub-human treatment. But as some of the viewers in the documentary picked up on, a deeper understanding of the artwork and artist as political agent revealed a dialectic at work, in which both the commodification and deconstruction of identity were present. The encaged person could also be read as a shaman whose ritual performance linked present and past, whose alchemy of power dynamics reversed social roles and presented an inverted perspective of world history. Like the nahual-shaman-guerrero described by Carlos Castañeda in *Don Juan Matus*, the shaman-warlock chooses to inhabit the body of a crow in order to see the world backwards. In her essay Fusco produces a timeline of the exhibition of indigenous American and African people who were exhibited in Europe and the US between 1493 and 1992, a timeline which she introduced by stating that "Performance Art in the West did not begin with Dadaist 'events.' Since the early days of the Conquest, 'aboriginal samples' were brought to Europe for aesthetic contemplation, scientific analysis, and entertainment." (p. 146-7). Fusco's intervention into the history of Northern representation and exploitation of people indigenous to the South is expressed through performance, text and interventions into the telling of this history.

By visibilizing a contemporary indigenous identity with two symbolic representatives from a lost tribe, they confronted viewers with the impossibility of a Eurocentric logic to

see indigenous people outside the frame of the ancient.⁷⁸ By reversing the gaze, the artists produced a subject that enacted the logic of Eurocentric violence, by either accepting the mistreatment of the couple in the cage or actively participating in their public debasing as a tourist attraction. Their reactions revealed a middle class art public still under the spell of Eurocentric world view and its limitations, following the behavioural protocols for the institutionally-produced subject that was reflected in the profile of the museum goer and art public of the time.⁷⁹

The Couple in the Cage was produced around the same time of the crisis of representation that radically altered the paradigms of representation across the academic world, from anthropology to art history. In the 1990s, feminist and postcolonial critiques left their mark upon the field of anthropology, along with the Writing Cultures debate, both leading to the crisis of representation that marked the paradigm shift that has been called “culture-as-text to culture-as-embodiment” (Westmoreland 726) around within the field. James Clifford, one of the writing cultures protagonists, offered a strategy for tracking the categorization of Non-Western cultural and art objects in a 1988 book

⁷⁸ The Guatinaui installation also questioned the association of folk art with indigeneity of the South, with a cage filled with mass produced objects like tomahawks and feathered head-dresses alongside ‘Western’ objects: a laptop, tv, weights. A stylized folk art influenced by indigenous motifs and fantastical mythology and labelled ‘naïve’ was encouraged by Western curators of art from many Souths from the 1940s through the 1980s— as Nada Shabout has documented in her recounting of the history of modern Arab art. Describing an art trend of incorporating local mythology or local scenes and traditions inspired by Islamic art, which developed during a period of national struggles in North Africa, Shabout outlines something akin to the label of magical realism: “Artists working in this style aimed at transforming folk stories and legends into imagery. In North Africa Western art critics encouraged what they labeled “naïve painting,” [also based on fantasy] which they considered a natural stylistic development for an underdeveloped peoples lacking in imagination.” (Shabout 18). She cites the work of Baya Mahieddine, the self-taught Algerian artist surrealist André Breton declared a child prodigy, and whose work, shown at blue-chip galleries in France alongside Picasso, has been described as combining ‘mysticism, paganism, and Islamic ornamentation’ (Ali cited in Shabout).

⁷⁹ Some of these subjects also saw themselves reflected in the cage. One man from El Salvador declared that a rubber heart hanging inside the cage was also his heart (Documentary). “I could see my own grandchildren in that cage...” another man in the audience said, reflecting on the experience of indigenous people in the Americas and their exploitation, objectification and commodification as a cultural object that could be appropriated in much the same way the Orientalist painters appropriated and exaggerated elements from Middle Eastern culture (building invented definitions and territories around these appropriations). He echoed Fusco and Gómez-Peña’s initial question of wanting to know how much, if anything had changed since colonial times when he said: “... I think it portrays and really brings home to me exactly how our people were treated and... I don’t know that we’re any better off today.” (Heredia and Fusco 1997). His question speaks to the ability of artworks to function as litmus test for historical and social change.

written in the period shortly after he began to engage theoretically with the work of the Black British theorists of Birmingham tradition. In his analysis he offers a diagram illustrating the categorization and value of indigenous objects (and their blockage and validation through a Eurocentric system) in what he termed ‘the art-culture system: a machine for making authenticity’. The diagram contrasted high value objects from the art market and museums (zone 1) with low value objects of tourist art (commodified reproductions, and curio items; zone 4); claiming there could be no direct movement between these two zones, although much traffic occurred of objects moving between the other 3 zones (p. 225). These were precisely the kind of objects and routes Fusco and Gómez-Peña presented to the public as part of the Couple in the Cage installation. They produced a kind of alchemy around the neo-indigenous object commodified into kitsch souvenirs and costumes, transporting them, if only momentarily, into the realm of the museum.

Critical theorist Arjun Appadarai warned that even this kind of resistance was in fact futile, with the impossibility of not participating in the system, a system that would in turn commodify the resistance to commodification and the deconstruction of racial hierarchies. Using a term popular in 1990s critical theory, he describes the cultural system that is ‘always already’ there: “There is no cultural ideological praxis that is not always already produced by the movements of the transnational capital, which is to say, we are all factors of the global system, even if and when our actions misunderstand themselves as de-systematizing ones. So called oppositional discourse runs the most unfortunate risk of all: that of remaining blind to its own conditions of production as yet another kind of systemic discourse.” (Appadarai 1993, 198) It is difficult to deny Appadarai’s point of the omnipotent system far-reaching tentacles, always reproducing and interpellating back into its own centers, however, many artists of the 1990s began to make work in ways that changed one of the most basic foundation of the system: they ceased to become invisible in the global system which had heretofore rendered their contemporaneity an impossibility.

Soon after the Guatinauis had left London's Covent Garden to travel to other European stages, Mona Hatoum transformed a sunny room in the Serpentine gallery in London's Kensington Gardens into a shadowy cage for the bodies of her viewers, in her installation work "Light Sentence" (1992).⁸⁰ Visitors enter the confines of a large metal structure lite by a single naked light bulb slowly raised and lowered, creating a "lacey grid -like shadows that ripple on the walls, destabilizing the room's materiality and security by simulating an earthquake-like tremor." (Mikdadi 2008). Inside the cage, visitors immediately feel overcome by "tension inspired by those forms and shadows" (Tyson 2010) and "a visceral response of confinement and instability" (Mikdadi 2008). For Edward Said it was "a strangely awry room she introduces us into". (Said 2008, 291). Art historian Salwa Mikdadi sees this work (and its related series of grid-like structures made of everyday objects) as informed by the experience of the Palestinian Nakba⁸¹ ('catastrophe') of 1948, when Hatoum's parents fled Palestine along with thousands of other Palestinians who were displaced from their homeland. For Hatoum, the work is informed by the details of her personal history but it is also about many other issues. Light Sentence is about institutional violence, an issue Hatoum speaks about through a visceral instability in 'Light Sentence', a piece she conceived of shortly after switching from making work with her own body to work for the viewer's body.⁸²

Hatoum describes the problem between being forced into essentialism (being asked the same question in interviews over and over again what is 'Arab' about her work)⁸³ and

⁸⁰ "Light Sentence", like Hatoum's other work, did not follow the trope of the primitive. She was asked continuously what exactly was 'Arab' about her work – Western critics could not apply the same formulaic reading of identifying an indigenous aesthetic or tradition as had been done with the work of Mahieddine (and others who worked in the same vein).

⁸¹ Nakba means "catastrophe" in Arabic

⁸² "By the late '80s I wanted to take my body, the body of the performer, out of the work. I wanted the viewer's body to replace mine by interacting directly with the work. My work always constructed with the viewer in mind. The viewer is somehow implicated or even visually or psychologically entrapped in some of the installations." Janine Antoni, "Mona Hatoum," *BOMB Magazine*, 1998, <http://bombmagazine.org/article/2130/mona-hatoum>.

⁸³ "Hatoum I dislike interviews. I'm often asked the same question: What in your work comes from your own culture? As if I have a recipe and I can actually isolate the Arab ingredient, the woman ingredient, the Palestinian ingredient. People often expect tidy definitions of otherness, as if identity is something fixed

making work that is inspired by an experience (or context) but not limited to one explanation, one feeling or one interpretation.⁸⁴

Like Fusco and Gomez-Peña, Hatoum creates a kind of open system in her work, where she meets the viewer with an experience and institutional critique, where things are not what they appear at first glance, where the even the ordinariness of objects cannot be taken for granted and where ‘the known’ is questioned. Metal bars of pet cages, light bulbs, converse sneakers, grass skirts, commercialized indigenous costumes all become implicit to a critique of a system that produces and normalizes them. This method of theorizing through art, operates on many levels but especially on the border of thoughts, belief systems and national frontiers. It offers a site for theorizing through play, through dialogue, where the severity of violence is juxtaposed with the irrepressibility of playfulness; where the internalized logic of hegemony becomes unraveled as its own limits and borders become visible. Edward Said has described Hatoum’s work as operating both within and outside the logic of cultural definitions: “No one has put the Palestinian experience in visual terms so austere and yet so playfully, so compellingly

and easily definable...if you come from an embattled background there is often an expectation that your work should somehow articulate the struggle or represent the voice of the people. That’s a tall order really. I find myself often wanting to contradict those expectations.” (Antoni 1998).

⁸⁴ “It’s more the inconsistencies that bother me, like when people refer to me as Lebanese when I am not. Although I was born in Lebanon, my family is Palestinian. And like the majority of Palestinians who became exiles in Lebanon after 1948, they were never able to obtain Lebanese identity cards. It was one way of discouraging them from integrating into the Lebanese situation. Instead, and for reasons that I won’t go into, my family became naturalized British, so I’ve had a British passport since I was born. I grew up in Beirut in a family that had suffered a tremendous loss and existed with a sense of dislocation. When I went to London in 1975 for what was meant to be a brief visit, I got stranded there because the war broke out in Lebanon, and that created another kind of dislocation. How that manifests itself in my work is as a sense of disjunction. For instance, in a work like *Light Sentence*, the movement of the light bulb causes the shadows of the wire mesh lockers to be in perpetual motion, which creates a very unsettling feeling. When you enter the space you have the impression that the whole room is swaying and you have the disturbing feeling that the ground is shifting under your feet. This is an environment in constant flux—no single point of view, no solid frame of reference. There is a sense of instability and restlessness in the work. This is the way in which the work is informed by my background. On the other hand, I have now spent half of my life living in the West, so when I speak of works like *Light Sentence*, *Quarters* and *Current Disturbance* as making a reference to some kind of institutional violence, I am speaking of encountering architectural and institutional structures in Western urban environments that are about the regimentation of individuals, fixing them in space and putting them under surveillance. What I am trying to say here is that the concerns in my work are as much about the facts of my origins as they are a reflection on or an insight into the Western institutional and power structures I have found myself existing in for the last 20-odd years.” (Antoni 1998).

and at the same moment so allusively,” describing how her work is able to speak to a regional experience while functioning outside the fixing or stereotyping of Orientalism (Said 2001, 1).

Hatoum envisions her own development as an artist through the process of moving from the didactic to a dialogue with the viewer and the viewer’s assumptions, in what she calls an open system where the political and the aesthetic meet:

When my work shifted from the obviously political, rhetorical attitude into bringing political ideas to bear through the formal and the aesthetic, the work became more of an open system. Since then I have been resisting attempts by institutions to fix the meaning in my work by wanting to include it in very narrowly defined theme shows.⁸⁵

In this description of her approach, Hatoum maps her method of resisting the limits of the art-institution, in which she is a major player with solo exhibitions in well-known cannon museums and has held a high art market value for more than three decades. She questions the viewers attitudes and belief systems through involving them in a bodily, visceral experience that necessitates confronting the boundary between fiction and truth. Writing about a very different group of art-makers during the same time period (1991), Amalia Mesa-Bains posited that the art created by Chicana artists “does not simply reflect ideology, it constructs ideology.” This construction of an alternative way of being/thinking/experiencing/making is the key ingredient to Hatoum’s process, as she moves from her own bodily experience to those of her audience.⁸⁶ Speaking to this kind of intervention into ideology that artists of color were making through their art in the

⁸⁵ She continues, “In a very general sense I want to create a situation where reality itself becomes a questionable point. Where one has to reassess their assumptions and their relationship to things around them. A kind of self-examination and an examination of the power structures that control us: Am I the jailed or the jailer? The oppressed or the oppressor? Or both. I want the work to complicate these positions and offer an ambiguity and ambivalence rather than concrete and sure answers. An object from a distance might look like a carpet made out of lush velvet, but when you approach it you realize it’s made out of stainless steel pins which turns it into a threatening and cold object rather than an inviting one. It’s not what it promises to be. So it makes you question the solidity of the ground you walk on, which is also the basis on which your attitudes and beliefs lie”. (Antoni 1998).

⁸⁶ In her approach to the body, especially in work predating *Light Sentence*, Hatoum developed a certain kind of feminism that responded to the occupation of Palestine, among other issues. This vein of her work reflects similar concepts developed by Chela Sandoval in her 1991 foundational essay “US Third World Feminism: The Theory and Method of Oppositional Consciousness in the Postmodern World,” which laid the base for the interseccionalidad of the 2000s.

1980s and 90s, within the diasporic context of the South within the North, Stuart Hall identified the active role in subject-making as present in art that was “not a second-order mirror held up to reflect what already exists, but as that form of representation which is able to constitute us as new kinds of subjects” in his reading of contemporary Caribbean and Black British cinema (Hall 1990, 560–72).⁸⁷ In Hatoum’s cage she remakes her viewer’s reality into her own, inverting the gaze of othering; in the Guatinaui’s cage the artists invert the gaze of the neo-colonialist on the subaltern, offering the audience a confrontation with their own participation in the history of violence and the process that commodifies or feeds upon the spectacle of indigeneity.

Both pieces can also be viewed in opposition to the trend of primitivism, one of the most pervasive hegemonic trends in the art world,⁸⁸ and its successor, magical realism, a term imposed by Northern scholars and rejected by many Latin American scholars and artists that nonetheless haunted the area of Latin American studies and art criticism for much of the 80s and 90s.⁸⁹ Like Gayatri’s subaltern, the performance of symbolic visuals and sounds by two artists within a cage reflects the thesis of the lack of voice of the subaltern,

⁸⁷ Edward McCaughan (2012) places these two concepts in dialogue within his review of the role art and artists have played in social movements, and cultural theorizing around politically-charged artwork, see p. 3-5.

⁸⁸ This theme of primitivism was especially present in the 1980s when many major museums of the North were producing exhibitions about primitivist art from the South. Their strategy was to feature unauthored pieces by indigenous artists and artisans, to show how they influenced the aesthetic language of the canonical artists of modern European art.

⁸⁹ After widespread popularity through movies, art and classics by Gabriel García Márquez, Salman Rushdie, Toni Morrison, and Ben Okri, the term ‘magical realism’ became recognized both positively as a “discourse for a kind of international literary diaspora, a fictional cosmopolitanism” (Faris 2002, 101) and negatively as provincializing stereotype applied to all Latin American works (Fuentes) and “another one of those words that covered up what was going on” (Morrison cited in Faris 109). Magical realism is also related in some ways to post-colonialism, declared by some to be liberatory even while mirroring the othering found in primitivism that rendered the indigenous and the life of poor commoners exotic and childlike (Taussig), was also related by some to post-colonial discourse.⁸⁹ In his essay “Magical Realism as Postcolonial Discourse” (1988) Canadian literary scholar Stephan Slemon proposes an interstitial space brought into being in magical realist narratives which mirrors what he imagines as the clashing of two ‘oppositional’ systems in post-colonial existence, which remain “suspended, locked in a continuous dialectic with the ‘other,’ a situation which creates disjunction within each of the separate discursive systems, rending them with gaps, absences, and silences.” Slemon also cites Maria Takolander’s assertion that magical realism implies a necessary “fakery” by “by presenting the lives of Latin Americans in fantastical terms and playing the fantasy off as somehow truer to their lives. Takolander notes that this isn’t necessarily a criticism of magical realism so much as those who attempt to use it to understand real Latin American cultures.”

as well as the translation and displacement of diaspora, and the resistance to ever-present stereotypes of the West, which would locate authentic indigeneity in the past, far from the sound of the television or the clicking of finger buttons on a laptop keyboard. The problem with inserting these two works into the larger system of the art institution was that some art historians and critics read them to be representative of the subaltern or of whole regions, simply because they represented new voices in the art world that were previously ignored or made to be invisible. This essentialising view is something Hatoum especially resisted in her consistent attempt not to be comply with an art historical perspective that tried to explain her work as an expression of culture, as if her work could be understood by merely reading her biography (which was in many cases misinterpreted as it did not fit neatly into the multiculturalist categories of race, culture and ethnicity).

Hatoum, Fusco and Gomez-Peña proposed radical changes in re-thinking of the hegemonic systems against the backdrop of the paradigm of multiculturalism and its erasing, essentialising version of so-called equality. In the stretch between the 80s and 90s, the theoretical move away from the colonial crystallised into two main branches. The first group, which sprung out of Spivak and Said's writings in the late 1970s/early 1980s is often called the "Subaltern Studies Group," centred on Orientalism and studies from India, informed by the lens of being a part of the theorists of colour in the North, a marginalised position. Shortly after, developing in the 1990s, came another group of theorists on the South. Nicknamed "Grupo Modernidad/Decolonialidad," this school of mostly white male scholars from South America centers on the work of Walter Mignolo and Aníbal Quijano (Enrique Dussell, Nestor García Canclini, and other members, many of whom deny the existence such an actual group). Unlike Said and Spivak, this group of scholars were part of a privileged group in Latin America, while marginalised on the global stage of academia, educated and born outside of the North. The Decolonial group took issue with the idea of linear modernity that excluded the South, which they viewed as a continuation of 'coloniality'. While the Subaltern group was deeply influenced by class and gender, these two indexes were largely ignored by the Decolonial group, who instead focused on race and geography, the "other" in indigenous and black identity and

the exploitation that had enabled the trademarks of global capitalism - extreme wealth and extreme poverty organized by racial hierarchies.⁹⁰ Models from each tradition have been informed by aesthetics and visual culture, and in turn, have been incorporated into art criticism on the South. The move from the 1990s idea of entering a 'post' colonial condition to the 2000s act of moving away from coloniality pivoted on the inclusion of the transnational and a connection between colonialism and global capitalism. Both terms emphasize the condition of the colonial, rather than the other aspects/conditions of the South beyond and outside the imposition of colonialism, minimizing the importance of all other systems and histories that predate and postdate colonialism.

Postcolonial narratives on territorialisation, inside and outside of the metaphoric cage, developed into lasting themes of the 1990s Southern art worlds⁹¹. Local scenes were radically affected by the new presence of foreign cultural centres which have been identified as point of neo-colonial machinery, operating as filters which control the production, exportation and (often covertly) the sale of contemporary art from the South, like the Centro Cultural España in San Salvador, founded in 1997, or the Townhouse Gallery in Cairo, founded in 1998.⁹² In one of the few ethnographies focusing on the 1990s urban contemporary art scene in Cairo, American anthropologist Jessica Winegar

⁹⁰ Black diaspora theorizing played an important role in both genres and their views on the effects of colonialism on the world-system.

⁹¹ "Light Sentence" and "The Couple in the Cage" signalled a larger trend of resistance operating from within and against popular postcolonial and decolonial ideas about art from the South (primitivism, folk art, magical realism, etc.) In the 1980s, large institutions of the North featured blockbuster exhibitions depicting how the canons of modern art from the North had been influenced by primitive indigenous art from Africa, Latin America, and the Pacific Islands that was deemed anonymous. Fusco and Gómez-Peña refused to give their fictitious characters names – choosing the anonymous label 'two Undiscovered Amerindians' – and mirroring this trend of crediting indigenous artists by culture but not by name, thus denying them human agency or artist status while dehumanizing their position to being part of the animal world. This is a common exhibition practice from the World's Fairs that continues today in museums of Natural History, where indigenous people of colour are displayed alongside flora, fauna and animal kingdoms of the world.

⁹² As documented in *Creative Reckonings* (2006) the Townhouse Gallery played an increasingly far-reaching role after its founding in the late 1990s, controlling much of the outside funding through a re-grant system and implementing a curatorial selection strategy of vetting artists that would become international stars. The intentions and actions of the Canadian-owned and Ford Foundation funded Quartz Gallery (a pseudonym for the Townhouse Gallery) have been described as neo-colonialist. In a similar way, the Centro Cultural España in El Salvador began to act as an influential filter in the selection, promotion and funding of local Salvadoran artists.

locates artists as the intermediaries between the systems of the North and South, “interlocuters” in a state of perpetual “reckoning with genealogies of the modern” with “the histories of ancient Egypt, European modernism, anti-colonial nationalism, and state socialism—all in the context of a growing neoliberal economy marked by American global dominance.” (2006, p.21). She uses the term to “explore how they created meaning and value in a period of social, economic, and political transformation,” (getting at the agency of artists within these larger processes).⁹³ Most importantly, the concept of reckoning has qualities of agency and being process-based. The Egyptian arts interlocuters’ maintained an active, creative, and on-going engagement with the many different values, forms, ideologies, and histories associated with the modern. Against the curatorial narratives that accuse Egyptians of imitating Western artists, it resists the totalizing aspects of the “progress” narrative. (ibid) ⁹⁴

This time period has been described by Chin-Tao Wu as “a period of privatization of everything, including what was once outside of or against the reach of capitalism including avant-garde and radical art” (Sholette and Stimson xiv). Building upon this notion, Stimson and Sholette declared the necessary re-thinking of collective practices of the period after modernism through the frame of Marxism, to “theorize it as form of production and intervention that raises fundamental questions about the nature of creative labour and how history is recorded and transmitted, for whom, and to what ends (ibid, xvii). They categorized the new kind of collectivism developed after the cold war period as a kind of “specter that haunts capitalism’s globalization,” borrowing Michael Denning’s term (ibid, 4). Using this concept, they describe models and examples of global collectivism in the public domain such as the collectivism of the internet (ebay, amazon, cloud sharing music sites from napster to spotify, blogs, listservs) and the kind of offline collectivism “of public opinion rising and falling on the Arab street or

⁹³ “If we think of Egyptian arts interlocuters as navigating their way through the major social transformations of post-Cold War Egypt by creatively calculating their positions and dealing with the exigencies and problematics put forward by various genealogies of the modern, we arrive at a much more accurate and dynamic understanding of postcolonial cultural production than that usually found in Western art writing about it. “(Winegar 1995).

ricocheting across Al Jazeera's or Al Qaida's networks or whispering in this or that secret, self-isolated cell gathered together in a cave in the Pakistani countryside, or in an apartment in metro Toronto." (ibid, xi).

Like the internet, the new globalization of capital and culture all lead back to one place: the European-dominated US and its model of contemporary Eurocentrism. Instead of a plethora of theories about indigenous time that is outside and beyond the time of capitalism or even Marxism, the contemporary theorists, curators and art historians refer back again and again to the Western theoretical cannon of both art and thought. The theories of multiculturalism stand in for the real theories of the South, working to erase and limit all creative production from the South into the Eurocentric model. Latin American art, for example, has become a reference for anti-dictatorship ideological art, a model cited in contemporary art historical texts regarding many other places in the world.

The so-called "third world" artist's body of the 1990s was made to perform difference – racial, geographical, technological, sexual, and gender difference, mirroring the famous theorizing of Judith Butler who's theory of gender and sexuality as fluid performances rather than static performance was a defining tenant of identity politics. "A survey of critical writing in both postcolonial studies and electronic media theory," wrote Latina Art historian María Fernández, "discloses an overwhelming preoccupation with the body, identity, history, feminism, and agency that could be used imaginatively toward common ends." Fernández describes the Southern theorizing of this era so important to artistic practices and thinking of the 1990s:

Frantz Fanon, Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, and Anne McClintock, among others, have written extensively on the over determination of the racialized body as sign and have explored connected issues in the representation of colonized and postcolonial peoples: mimicry, stereotyping, exoticism, and primitivism.⁹⁵ (1999, p. 20)

⁹⁵ Fernández points to Foucault as the main influence of this line of thinking, as she continues: "The vision of this new being in the passage that follows emerges from the 1966 mind of Michel Foucault. The psychic landscape Foucault describes in the following passage images the cultural terminations and beginnings that typify postmodernism globalization, the end of "Western man," the homogenization of difference, and some other, utopian, decolonizing zone as well." (ibid).

These themes, also central to the practices of the three artists discussed in this section during the 1990s, would take on a different use in relation to the body during the next two decades of art from the Global South.

Phantom in the Archive, 2000-2015

In many works of the 2000s, there became apparent a trend of moving away from the artist's body as central site of the work and moving towards the body of others, standing in as social signifiers and protest of the conditions of global excess. The artist's body, once central to 1980s and 90s practices, began to disappear from the works circulating on a global level, and in its place appeared representation of the social body, often taking the shape of a phantom body haunting the work of art. This kind of replicant body became an avatar for the artist to deliver mediations on social critique and injustice. Artists and theorists across the South at the beginning of this new century found themselves confronting the divide between a widening of visibility on ideologies from the South and a narrowing essentialism of a kind of 'identity politics' planted in the 1990s. Wrestling with this divide, Chicana theorist Chela Sandoval described Guillermo Gómez-Peña's performances as "contemporary examples of globalizing "third world" politics enacted within first world nation-states" (1999, p. 208). "Postmodern aesthetic forms (such as punk culture, the songs of Laurie Anderson, and the performance pieces of Guillermo Gómez-Peña or Monica Palacios)" she wrote, could be understood as "postmodern pastiche as an aesthetic form that is both empty and full at the same time, a site of active possibility..." (ibid).⁹⁶ Sandoval understood the falsity of this binary of North and South, evidenced by an inseparable dialectical relationship, of South politics existing in the North, and the fluid place of post-modern aesthetics as 'active possibility,' where

⁹⁶ She further describes it as "a mode of production and perception that expanded in the late twentieth century to the point where all first world citizen-subjects are faced with the dissolution of subjectivity's wholeness... into the possibilities of an empty form capable of constantly refilling. The extremities of life lived in the regions of social subjugation, war, and postmodernism unlock the shackles of perception, and provide the methods by which postmodern being can fill with resistance." (ibid).

hierarchies and boundaries can be inverted. Sandoval's theories marked the beginning of a resistance to the fixed formulas of Multiculturalism that would be challenged throughout the first fifteen years of the 21st century.

This resistance to Multiculturalism was accompanied by an increase in recognizing the knowledges from the South that refused to be categorized and limited by the institutionalization of a concept like the Multicultural. Chicano literary theorist Rafael Pérez-Torres understood this as rift between two opposing kinds of multiculturalisms: 1) a "reactionary" multiculturalism that engenders a pseudo-equality for diverse cultures, races, and ethnicities within a neo-colonial system, replicating the ideology of the melting pot in a neo-traditional logic that ignores the inequalities in power distribution between dominant and minority groups, and 2) a "resistant" multiculturalism that "foregrounds a basic inequality within the mosaic of multicultural America" (1995, p.251). Like Sandoval, Perez-Torres argued that Chicano creative expression was a part of a postcolonial discourse resisting a reactionary multiculturalism and marginalisation. He borrowed from Deleuz and Guattari's concept of a minor literature to understand the positioning of Chicano poetry within the dominant hegemony of United States literature. It was a strategy used by Latin American art thinkers over the next ten years.⁹⁷

Following this kind of resistance to the categorizing of the South and its artistic expression came the trend of the 'parafictional' – a strategy artists of the 21st century used to critique the logic and validity of narratives reified by a Euro-centric history and world-view. In 2002, one of the most famous artworks of this era was created by Walid Raad under the pseudonym of the The Atlas Group, a fictional historic archive on the

⁹⁷ Perez-Torres bases his theorizing of a resistant multiculturalism that mobilizes around the issue of oppression on Hal Foster's reading of a kind of non-critical postmodernism as "re-inscribing social control" versus a critical postmodernism that "seeks to question rather than exploit cultural codes, to explore rather than conceal social and political affiliations" (Foster 1983 *The Anti-Aesthetic*: xii cited in Pérez-Torres, 1995). In his seminal text on post-modernism, Foster, an art critic who was editor of *Art in America* at the time he published this anthology describes a oppositional post-modernism concerned with deconstructing modernism and resisting the status quo, with a "desire to change the object and its social context" (in opposition to a reactionary post-modernism that normalized a neo-conservative reifying of "lost traditions set against modernism") resistance to the status quo.

Lebanese wars which was introduced into the global art spotlight as a part of Documenta 11 (and later included in large exhibitions and blue chip galleries around the world). The Atlas Group cemented the ‘parafictional’⁹⁸ as a new category in contemporary art with its critique of the historical and the documentary. American art critic Kaelen Wilson-Goldie described it as “a serious and fastidious approach to the accumulation of documents related to Lebanon’s recent history in general, and the country’s fifteen years of civil war in particular... with all the trappings of traditional documentary research.” But, Wilson-Goldie continues, “those documents—some found, others produced—function not as emblems of fact or scraps of evidence to support the assertions of history, but rather as traces, as symptoms, as strange structural links between history, memory, and fantasy, between what is known to be true and what is needed to be believed”. (Wilson-Goldie 2009).⁹⁹ Raad’s emblematic use the “parafictional” brought to the forefront a critique of capitalist thinking around global crisis, war, and public memorializing.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Lambert-Beatty coins the term parafictional to describe a kind of 2000s hegemonic critique embedded in many artworks of this period when “Fiction or fictiveness... emerged as an important category in recent art. But, like a paramedic as opposed to a medical doctor, a parafiction is related to but not quite a member of the category of fiction as established in literary and dramatic art. It remains a bit outside. It does not perform its procedures in the hygienic clinics of literature, but has one foot in the field of the real. Unlike historical fiction’s fact-based but imagined worlds, in parafiction real and/or imaginary personages and stories intersect with the world as it is being lived. Post-simulacral, parafictional strategies are oriented less toward the disappearance of the real than toward the pragmatics of trust. Simply put, with various degrees of success, for various durations and for various purposes, these fictions are experienced as fact.” (p. 54)

⁹⁹ Wilson-Goldie highlights how Raad’s research-based art can also be read as a trace: “Walid Raad... is the driving force behind ... the Atlas Group, which takes a serious and fastidious approach to the accumulation of documents related to Lebanon’s recent history in general, and the country’s fifteen years of civil war in particular. As such, Raad’s work has all the trappings of traditional documentary research. Yet appearances can be deceptive. Imagine Lebanese historians frittering away their time at the racetrack, gambling on finish-finish photos, while shells are being lobbed back and forth throughout the country. Imagine police investigators, tasked with solving the crimes of car bombings, but fixating instead on the particular trajectory of the engines launched from those detonated vehicles. Raad may not be pulling his viewers’ legs, but he may just be holding back the hint of a smile and cocking one eyebrow as if to suggest slyly, “You see? Things aren’t always as they seem. After all, the Atlas Group thrives on documents, filing them away into three distinct categories that comprise the organization’s archives. But those documents—some found, others produced—function not as emblems of fact or scraps of evidence to support the assertions of history, but rather as traces, as symptoms, as strange structural links between history, memory, and fantasy, between what is known to be true and what is needed to be believed” (ibid)

¹⁰⁰ It can also be noted that the artist’s body is completely absent from the work, even absent from main authorship at first. Raad uses a phantom collective body to stand in for the institutional critique he wished to bring to both art world and global treatment of the Lebanese conflict. He uses images many substitutes to stand in for the author and the male body of the artist – a fictional Dr. Fakhouri with images of his father, a

The fact that many believed the Atlat Group artwork to be fact emphasized the falsities and myths still surrounding the Arab world in the 2000s, as media-narratives continued to be held as world truisms. In 2007, the Costa Rican artist Habacuc (aka Guillermo Vargas) presented regional audiences with a para-fictional work that shocked and repulsed the local world. Based upon a digital archive and lack of/excess of information from the media, Habacuc's *Exposicion #1* was displayed in 2009 at the Alliance Frances in San Salvador. In an empty gallery room, Vargas placed a locally crafted clay pot on the floor (emitting crack cocaine smoke), next to a bony street dog tied by rope to the gallery wall. Above the dog was a sign on the wall written in dog food: "eres lo que lees"¹⁰¹ The artist named the dog "Natividad," after a Nicaraguan migrant who was murdered by security dogs while armed police watched and onlookers filmed the death on their cell phones. Through a whirlwind of social media responses (encouraged by a blog penned secretly by the artist) the work caused controversy for a wide-reaching public who (erroneously) called it "dead dog art". The rumor arose that the dog was left to starve in the gallery, causing public outrage and protest campaigns. In El Salvador artists described the piece to me as "un artista que pone un perro en un cuarto de la galleria y lo deja morir."¹⁰² Salvadoran American art historian Kency Cornejo understood the real political intention of the work as an attempt to call attention to the inhumane and routine discrimination against poor Nicaraguan migrants in the region (largely ignored by local press).¹⁰³

well-known Lebanese actor who plays the role of an ex-hostage giving testimony, a watchman guard who reveals his poetic side. In this sense, the body is dematerialized from the work of art, and the real body of the artist turned into a phantom that haunts the archival work. (ibid)

¹⁰¹ "You are what you read," referring to the fake news circulated by the artist about the work and real news about Natividad which was received with hatred and anti-immigrant sentiment by local audiences who left posts racializing and condemning Natividad for being poor rather than criticizing a system that would let him be eaten by dogs as crowds watched on and videoed the gory assault as spectacle.

¹⁰² Author's translation: "an artist who puts a dog in a gallery room and leaves him there to die."

¹⁰³ Cornejo recounts the grim side of migration told through a tale of a gruesome death filmed by anti-immigrant onlookers: "Habacuc intentionally named the dog Natividad to refer to the notorious case of Natividad Leopoldo Canda. At the age of thirteen, following his father's death, Natividad abandoned school and immigrated to Costa Rica in pursuit of work to provide his family with better living conditions. However, once in Costa Rica, only further poverty and discrimination confronted him, and his attempts to secure a job and transcend Costa Rica's hostile anti-immigrant environment failed. Without a job and money, he began living under a bridge, became addicted to crack cocaine, stole for survival, and accrued a criminal record for petty theft. Then, around midnight, on the night of November 10, 2005, Natividad

Emphasising the complicity of the public in the maintenance of a colonial system of violence (expressed through a lack of action by the public to save the dog or Canda), she reads the work through the decolonial theory of Quijano.¹⁰⁴

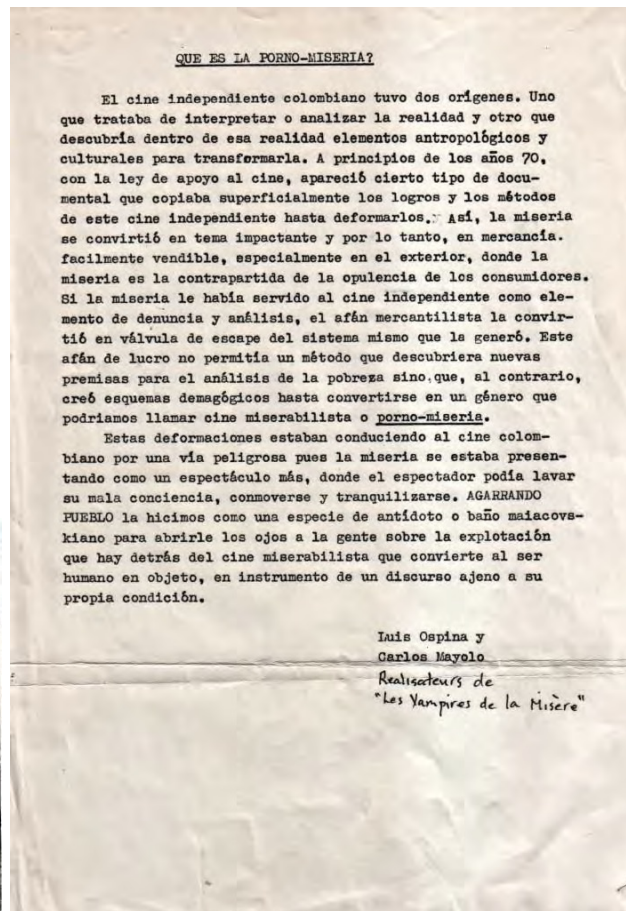
Exposicion #1 reaches outside the N/S binary and tropes of territory and migration, occupying the local art world with something that is “not art”; a parafiction that rouses the notion of the ethical, a critique of violence normalized into national territories, a breach against the system of the criminalisation of poverty. Like American art theorist Stephen Wright’s concept of double ontology in contemporary art, “It doesn’t look, or not look, like art. It looks like what it is: the redundant thing or action.” (Wright, 54, cited in Sholette 2014, 99). The “coefficient” of art, it is: “a radically deontological conception of art—as socialized competence, rather than performed works. A way of describing art gone fallow, and then to seed; finding itself in a permanent state of extraterritorial reciprocity, having no territory of its own.” (Wright 13, cited in Sholette 2014, 99). This reading of art as socialized competence, deterritorialized from its own state of being, is akin to the kind of ‘undoing’ increasingly popular in the late 2000s. As some, like López, sought to detach the label of Latin American conceptual art as necessarily socially-charged, others, like Faguet, unearthed art theories like ‘pornomiseria’¹⁰⁵ (poverty porn)

jumped over a wall and entered the Taller Romero (warehouse) with the supposed intentions of stealing goods that he could sell. According to reports, the security guard, Luis Hernandez Quezado, who knew Natividad, released two Rottweilers that immediately began to attack the young man.¹⁰ As Natividad’s screams echoed in the night, a growing crowd of neighbors quickly arrived at the scene, followed by the police and the media. Rather than intervening, and following the owner’s orders not to shoot the dogs, the police and all the spectators simply watched as the two Rottweilers devoured Natividad Canda for an entire hour. The attack finally ceased when the fire department used a water pressure hose to distance the dogs long enough to remove Natividad, who was then limp, semi-conscious, and immobile.” (p. 54)

¹⁰⁴ She writes, “The premise of the work both includes and extends beyond the specific Natividad case to the idea of spectacle and viewer complicity to colonialist structures and institutions. The text “eres lo que lees” underlines the main concept of the work, which Habacuc communicated through the two Natividad’s stories. In this way, while categorized as an “installation,” Habacuc’s profound critique of society and the media is better understood in the context of conceptual art, and makes an important contribution to and enriches the scholarly dialogue developing about conceptualism in Latin America that has only begun to include Central American artists.” (p. 56)

¹⁰⁵ But it was not until the late 2000s that would it be read as relevant to a larger phenomenon occurring across the Americas. In 1977, the year of *Orientalism*’s publication, independent filmmakers Luis Ospina and Carlos Mayolo presented a manifesto (Image 1g) for a concept they invented to critique the commodification of images of Colombian poverty, a process which sold the objectification of poor people to European audiences, and like *Orientalism*, created an imaginary geography based on an exploitation of exaggerated notions of the cultural other. Ospina and Mayolo called their concept “porno-miseria”,

applied it to the current state of art thinking. Like Orientalism, 'pornomiseria' was a concept that could be applied not only to one country but a whole region concept. Like The Atlas Group projects and Exposición #1, it hinged upon the parafiction of the pseudo-documentary and a belief in art as a place for the correction (and hence redemption) of history. All three posed as subversions of a system of cultural exploitation pointing to the humiliation of the subaltern,¹⁰⁶ the subject still invisible and one of the most vulnerable to neo-liberal violence.



Images 1f and 1g: Scene from Agarrando Pueblo (1977) and an image of the Porno-miseria Manifesto by Ospina and Mayolo (1977).

composing the manifesto to accompany the presentation of their pseudo-documentary Agarrando Pueblo (1977) (Image 1f) in a European festival.

¹⁰⁶ Embedded in their film and made obvious by the manifesto, Ospina and Mayolo modeled an example of speaking with the subaltern and speaking out against the system of oppression which debased and ridiculed the subaltern for being poor (though this should not be confused with speaking for the subaltern nor did it give the subaltern a voice, rather, it rendered visible the intent of middle class filmmakers to speak for the subaltern and exploit their images in exchange for European funding and audience).

Chapter 2

How did they incorporate art from the South?

Curatorial Strategies from 1989

The critical lenses explored in the previous chapter developed in tandem with the development of discourses of display in exhibition strategies. In this chapter I will examine the history of exhibition-making and its significance to the display of art from the global South on an international stage, through tracing contrasting multiculturalist ideologies practiced in two key exhibitions from 1989. These two large exhibitions, *Magiciens de la Terre* and the Third Havana Biennial, became curatorial models for incorporating art from the South into the Northern systems of art history and large exhibitions. I will demonstrate how this happened by tracing the two 1989 models into the geographic turn with a de-colonial reading of exhibition history of exhibition-making.

The beginning of the world: 1989 Exhibitions

1989, the year of two fundamental exhibitions in late modernism, one in Havana and the other in Paris, went down in world history as a year of extreme change, unexpected and unprecedented. Satellite technology played a particularly important role in the collective experience of 1989, when people in far apart worlds simultaneously watched the fall of the Berlin wall, the collapse of the Eastern bloc and unarmed protesters massacred in Tiananmen Square. As they watched the playback video of what would later come to be known as the 1989 revolutions, many considered the undoing of an old world and its protocol, and the yielding of a new, previously unthought-of, invisible world. The possibility of local situations having an impact in a larger context echoed in the newspapers, on television and in private diaries, in an era marked by the idea of the end of the end. By looking backwards to what was no longer, the 1990s became a post-cold war, post-communist, post-colonial and post-modern world marked by an almost

unstoppable surge in globalisation and Americanisation.

Magiciens de la Terre

Magiciens de la Terre, one of the most-cited landmark identity exhibitions, opened to audiences during the Parisian summer of 1989, at a moment when it was common to hear people on the streets say, “c'est magique” around the city (Boutoux 2009).¹⁰⁷ Just a year before, Gayatri Spivak had published her essay on the subaltern (Spivak 1985), a draft of a lecture she gave in 1985. Around the same time the Cars topped the international billboard charts singing, “Summer, summer, summer, it’s like a merry-go-round/Uh oh, it’s magic/Inside of you/Got a hold on you/That’s right, it’s magic”

A lecture series of talks was included with the exhibition, in which Spivak participated. She commented on the overwhelming pleasure at viewing the diverse quantity and quality of artworks, while noting an absence in the exhibition conference: missing were the voices of the many intellectual political activists from Africa who were working with the concept of the reversal of the other, which she understood to be a key dynamic of the show (Spivak 2011, 263). Her criticism got to the heart of a major issue – even though the exhibition was about reversing a power dynamic set up in colonial times, it’s greatest flaw would haunt the idea of the identity exhibition for years to come. Instead of embarking upon the truly radical task of having the South to curate its own image of itself, the exhibition repeated the old colonial task of dominating, defining and ultimately marketing the products of the South. This is evidenced not only in the stark absence of intellectual activists from the South when it came to the conference, but also in , the curatorial voice, with the designing, presenting, and defining of the images of the South. These imaginings were not only representative of the art and cultural production of the South – but were also read as renderings of the South itself (its cities, its so-called

¹⁰⁷ Thomas Boutoux recalled this common phrase he remembered from when he was a teenager in Paris in 1989, in his talk on *Magiciens de la Terre* for *Exhibitions and the World at Large*, at the Tate Britain in 2009.

‘modernisms’, its underbellies and crossroads). These images, sculptures and other kinds of art would emerge as coded representations for this vast and diverse area of the world over the next twenty-five years.

Opening just a few weeks after the fall of the Berlin wall, the timing of *Magiciens de la Terre* “dovetailed with two other exhibitions that sought “global reach” and came to be chronicled as noteworthy “identity exhibitions” – [the 3rd Havana Biennial] and *The Other Story* in London”. Reviewing Afterall journal’s series Making Art Global (which places in dialogue the much less cited 3rd Havana Biennial with the so-called landmark exhibition, *Magiciens de la Terre*), Natasha Ginwala observes some of the major themes these exhibitions brought to the forefront: the newness of ‘other’ modernisms created by a re-working of old concepts and widening diversity, as key themes of the 1989 exhibitions:

while all three exhibitions employed different curatorial strategies, and varied in extent, they revealed a panoply of perspectives on “other” Modernisms. These endeavours involved ‘a chewing over and spitting out’ that produced a renewed field of possibility and provoked transitions from an auto-tuned art history toward polyvocal and peripatetic frequencies of “elsewheres” (Ginwala 2011 (citing Esche), p. 62)

Here again the term ‘elsewheres’ makes an appearance as a popular 2000s term in curatorial discourse. Ginwala is citing Charles Esche’s use of the term in the introduction to this series, at once re-affirming the curatorial perspective that remains anchored in the centre/periphery concept, with a scope limited by an understanding of this plurality as part of the periphery. But what if this concept were inverted and one peripheral location in the South was to be transformed into the centre, a new headquarters from which to theorise, curate, define and represent the art of the times? What if radical activists (like those whom Spivak might have invited to critique the art and culture system) were in charge of this new theorising and practice? Could the art and culture system be radically changed, or would it re-produce the old hierarchies and re-align the peripheries around a new centre? Is it possible to imagine a cultural terrain with no centre nor peripheries?

Barbara Kruger put this question to *Magiciens de la Terre*'s audiences in her 1989 work by the same title. The work displayed prominently a large series of text that read: Qui sont la magiciens de la terre? Les vedettes de la télé? Les politiciens? Le journaliste? Les artistes? Les dealers?

Kruger's question echoed both the ambiguity of the exhibition's title and the new curatorial strategy of exhibiting traditional artworks from non-Western religions next to contemporary artworks by Western visual artists – an unusual practice in the field. Was the audience to understand so-called first-world contemporary artists as magicians, or the so-called third world “magic” as art? After all, the term ‘magic’ had historically been used to both belittle and fetishize the indigenous, non-Western religious beliefs and practices on display in the artwork featured in *Magiciens de la Terre*. But however insulting or new-age the title may have appeared, marking this affair or cultural moment as a magical moment, also served to obscure the real promise that the exhibition proposed in offering an escape from the strict ethnocentric categorising of the art world. Jean Fisher wrote that the curatorial strategy of Jean-Hubert Martin “buried [a potentially fruitful internal reflection on ‘the relationship of our culture to other cultures of the world’] under the obfuscating ahistorical and apolitical sign of ‘magic’” (Fisher 2011, 250). By ultimately entered into the territory of the trope of third world art as magical, a narrative which essentialises the indigenous artist or religious practitioner as being innately of the Earth, and the white contemporary artist as being of the world, or worldly as in a citizen of the world, free to travel, roam and appropriate other less privileged art and artists. Even though the exhibition contributed to the careers and travels of many non-Western artists, it still had difficulty transcending the very modern/primitive binary it sought to dismantle.

Not only could examining these works from very different contexts as equals have been fruitful for the West, as Fisher proposes, but the act of making the indigenous visual in a contemporary context was also significant. It proposed a promise, the beginning of an opportunity, although the system in which curator Martin encased the indigenous and the contemporary was certainly flawed. For instance, the fact that there were no traditional

works by indigenous Western or Northern religious nor white craftspeople only reinforced the definition of Western art as modern and non-Western as traditional, popular and craft-like. There was also a lack of contemporary artworks by indigenous artists, as Fisher has also noted in her criticism of the exhibition. Still, the promise the show proposed was that of equal consideration of the aesthetics from three distinct histories, placed in dialogue within the limitations of an exhibition. These were primarily the history of non-Western religious art, the history of popular art (sometimes known as craft), and the history of contemporary art from a Western fine art tradition (also known as Art History). Martin took great pains to select art from the first two categories and place them in textual, figurative, literal, and material dialogue with art from the latter category, a strategy similar yet different from the much maligned Primitivism exhibition which had taken place several years earlier at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, and showed how so-called 'primitive' from art from third world thousand-year old traditions had been appropriated by Western artists in modernist traditions. And even though each history had developed over hundreds, even thousands of years, and perhaps did inspire a unique triangulated dialogue, the kind of implicit comparing of these three distinct traditions implied by the exhibition could not escape the binaries of colonialism which pit the primitive against the modern, the third world against the first, and so on.

Much of the backlash of criticism after the exhibition focused on Martin's refusal to take into account in the show a third history: the traditions of Western art in non-Western places. For example, he opted not to show local artwork or trends he witnessed in art schools during site visits to Nigeria, where Western modernist was incorporated into local practices (Steeds et al 218). Along a similar vein, Martin eschewed the tastes of local art directors and curators who received him and his team of French researchers during site visits, dismissing their suggestions of artists and artworks as the kind of national art endorsed only by embassies and featured in the lobbies of international hotels in large non-Western cities.

In her headlining essay of *Making Art Global (Part 1): Magiciens de la Terre*, the 2012 book dedicated to re-thinking the significance of this exhibition, Lucy Steeds argues that

the exhibition's value lies in its being the first major international exhibition that was truly far-reaching, marking the way for both a pattern of exhibitions and a trend for the art market. Indeed, shortly after the exhibition, in the decade of the 1990s, the marketing and interest in non-Western craft and religious art (especially that categorised as kitsch) became a new phenomenon, and profits soared from Western and Northern audiences, as did the interest in 'world music' a new category particular to this era, perhaps personified by the Putumayo recording label, another series of non-Western art from far away places that was marketed and curated by another Northern white man, American Dan Storper. The defining of new genres through marketing an ever-increasing number of far away places to Western audiences became a trademark of the times, one that would bring the art world into its current era of neo-liberal global capitalism. Fisher explains the relationship between the West and the art of 'the other' as fitting into a neoliberal formula for marketable entertainment.¹⁰⁸

The dominant Western aesthetic structure she writes about is perhaps equally limiting for artworks created in the North, in the capitalist centres of the world, which under its narrative mantle become misrepresented and mislabelled along with those made in the other regions of the world. Deeply tied to capitalism and neoliberalism, this structure has been promoted in some of the most influential biennials of the last thirty years. In many ways, the strategies and methodologies employed in the curating of these events has revealed a kind of symbolic pact between the Western aesthetic structure, the art world and the ruling wealthy classes in regions across the world.¹⁰⁹ The most obvious visual reflection of this pact is perhaps the white cube, the dominant 20th and 21st century format for presentation in exhibitions from museums to biennials alike, since the age of modernism. Relying on white walls, often called "clean" or explained with the curatorial meme, it is a strategy for "letting the artwork breath." The white box of the museum

¹⁰⁸ "Western artworks are a symptom of division. Entertainment is fast becoming the only role available to them, and if the art of others is defined in terms of the Western aesthetic structure, it too is implicated as entertainment and loses its voice. The homogenising and universalising Western aesthetic is an alibi for refusing to hear the voice of the other, which is stigmatised as Babelian, incoherent, incapable of giving an account of itself. "(Fisher 2012, 251)

gallery format removes the work from any context but the museum's, encasing it in a location that is both a privileged place and a kind of "no-place". While erasing any connections to the local world which most likely informed the making of the work, it replaces that context with the rhetoric of museum high culture, it legitimises one visual form of modernism above all others, where the work becomes monumentalised and validated and 'fixed' inside a narrative – just as it is rendered lifeless.

In "The Global White Cube" (2005), Elena Filipovic traces the use of the windowless white cube¹¹⁰ to a display strategy developed by Alfred Barr Jr. for the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1929. She writes of the 'necessary fiction' of this strategy created to engender a dominant ideology.¹¹¹ With the encasing of works of art from around the world in the white cube, she argues, a symbolic connection is realised and a kind of 'whitewashing' occurs. In this sacred space of whiteness, the work of art not only becomes validated but becomes known through a narrative that is also about whiteness and racial dominance. And in turn, as the work is validated, it validates the system that encodes it, creating a situation echoing a paternal, colonial past.

Jean Fisher describes a different kind of visual symbol of a pact with dominant hegemony, equally as invisible and all-powerful, in her critique of the symbolic terrain drawn up in the exhibition of artworks in *Magiciens de la Terre*. She notes how dividing lines between Western and non-Western artists were drawn not only in the physical layout of the space but also in the practices leading up to the exhibition, which bordered

¹¹⁰ Filipovic offers this definition "...the minimal frame of white was thought to be "neutral" and "pure," an ideal support for the presentation of an art unencumbered by architectural, decorative, or other distractions. The underlying fiction of this whitewashed space is not only that ideology is held at bay, but also that the autonomous works of art inside convey their meaning in uniquely aesthetic terms. The form for this fiction quickly became a standard, a universal signifier of modernity, and eventually was designated the "white cube." (2005, 323)

¹¹¹ "From the MoMA's whitewashing forward, the white cube became a cipher for institutional officiousness, fortifying the ultimate tautology: an artwork belongs there because it is there. In that space of encounter, the ideal viewer (white, middle class) is also constructed – well behaved, solemn, disembodied, and able to focus on the singularity of the work of art with an uninterrupted gaze. Particular to the white cube is that it operates under the pretence that its seeming invisibility allows the artwork to speak best; it seems blank, innocent, unspecific, insignificant. Ultimately, what makes a white cube a white cube is that, in our experience of it, ideology and form meet, and all without our noticing it." (Filipovic 2005, 324)

on the tropes of the worldly Western artist who reference primitivism in their contemporary work.

The artist's vertical ring dominated the perspective of La Villete like the rose window of Notre-Dame, a giant 'solar anus' that oversaw everything including the horizontal Yuendumu earth paintings below it, rendering all the lateral exhibits on the floor as so many side chapels. (Fisher 2012, 255)¹¹²

These two invocations of whiteness and the church – or the white box and the solar anus - speak of the strategies and methodologies upon which the Western aesthetic frame is built, impoverished by the limits of its own creativity. The iconic 1989 Magiciens de la Terre promised in its curatorial statement to be the “first worldwide exhibition of contemporary art” with fifty artists from the US and Europe (an over-representation as less than half of the global population is located in this region) and 50 artists from elsewhere. From the latter group, artwork from the traditions of popular and religious were greatly overrepresented, with works like paper mache *alebrijes* from the Linares family of Mexico, a dance space fashioned with earth designs identical to one that would belong in a Vodun temple from priest Wesner Philidor. The exhibition curatorial team also employed another strategy that supported a binary colonialist narrative, omitting information from some of the artworks and projects which resisted the imposed categories.¹¹³ There is evidence of the extent to which the exhibition sub-narratives of an ethnic authenticity pitted against the modern and technologic, worked in direct opposition to the individual narratives of some of the artworks presented, such as the Yuendumu's use of broadcasting and aboriginal law.

¹¹² Further description: “This colonialist arrogance is perhaps exemplified by the working strategy of artists such as Richard Long, and the exhibition repeated the scenario when it sent a few Western artists into ‘marginal’ territories: Long, for example, visited the Australia Yuendumu community... Long’s work was a very large mud circle applied to a black wall. References to the work’s size recurred in the texts, as if this in itself were a value. The mud was from the Yuendumu’s terrain; but for this and its size, the piece was not substantially different from any other of Long’s mud works.” (Fisher 2012, 255).

¹¹³ Explaining this point with two examples, Fisher writes: “Most alarmingly, the emphasis in the curatorial selection of African exhibits of the ‘folkloric’ at the expense of modernist aesthetics gave the damaging impression that African modernism still doesn’t exist. Similarly, although the Yuendumu earth paintings made the show, it was not mentioned that, as the late Australian anthropologist Eric Micheals has described, they operate a creative video-production-and-broadcast unit structured around aboriginal law.” (Fisher 2012, 256).

Jump to the first decade of the 2000s, after numerous exhibition and curatorial responses to *Magiciens de la Terre*, and the establishing of a category of ‘identity exhibitions’ which seek to reveal and categorise “new” art from far away places for Western audiences and collectors influenced by Western art history trends. German art historian Hans Belting returns to this theme of the ethnic, claiming that outside the West, contemporary art is often embraced as part of recent local art currents because it offers resistance to canonical art history and to “ethnic traditions, which can seem like prisons for local culture in a global world.” (Belting 2006).¹¹⁴

This idea of the ethnic tradition becoming a like a prison “for local culture in a global world” has been repeated verbatim by Miguel Amado and other curators working in the global South. Belting goes on to explain what he means by ‘local art currents of recent origin,’ by declaring that there is no art history in much of the world outside the West, except for ethnic traditions, which he disqualifies because they have already been defined by older Western tropes that are now out of fashion.¹¹⁵ Perhaps he means there was no history of art or visuals or aesthetics in most parts of the world, or there was no Art History, meaning no trace of Western art history or traditions. To declare ethnic arts and crafts as a dead tradition seems to be less of a proven fact and more of a desire to locate the authentic indigenous in the past, far from modernity.

Seventeen years after *Magiciens de la Terre*, Belting categorises the indigenous or ethnic as having become a kind of cage for non-Western artists whom he places, along with their art as firmly within the category of ‘the new’. He lauds globalism for heroically

¹¹⁴ Belting writes, “Yet beyond the West, contemporary art has a very different meaning that is slowly also seeping into the Western art scene. There, it is hailed as a liberation from modernism’s heritage and is identified with local art currents of recent origin. In such terms, it offers revolt against both art history, with its Western-based meaning, and against ethnic traditions, which seem like prisons for local culture in a global world. There are reasons behind this double resistance that deserve our attention.” (Belting 2006).

¹¹⁵ “On the one hand, there was no art history in most parts of the world; therefore, it could not be appropriated like a ready-made. On the other hand, ethnic arts and crafts, as the favorite child of colonial teachers and collectors, no longer continues as a living tradition even if they survive as a commodity for global tourism. “The death of authentic primitive art,” to quote the title of a book by Shelly Errington, opens a space that contemporary art invades with its double character: as post-historical, with respect to the West, and post-ethnic, with respect to its own environments.(8) I do not say that this is a description of what is, but a description how artists nowadays feel.” (Belting 2006).

allowing for diverse ways of becoming modern, no longer centralised nor uni-directional in its world-view. For Belting, the idea that the global and the modern could be a Eurocentric Western tradition is now a concept that is rapidly moving into the past. Let's compare this reading of the ethnic and local within non-Western contemporary art to an actual example of the kind of artists Belting is referring to: the generation of 1990s Mexico City contemporary artists whom became internationally famous in the 2000s, mostly through the diffusion and popularity of a series of locally based and informed artworks. American curator Julie Rodrigues Widholm describes this generation for *Escultura Social: A New Generation of Art from Mexico City*, an exhibition she curated for the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago. Her curatorial intent, she writes, is not an attempt to "define a cohesive or national identity," but rather brings together works by artists of the same generation and location who share "an approach to art-making".¹¹⁶

Here there is a notable trace of not only the suppression of the indigenous and popular art histories, but a replacing of that with an allegiance to both European traditions and style, revealing the neo-liberal myth of the 'no place' which stands in for the globalising of Eurocentrism. Nearly three decades after Magiciens, an exhibition which polarised the artwork of the West and nonWest, we have the phenomenon of a new generation of Mexican artists who have made a name for themselves in the international contemporary art world by engaging with "international practices" (does this mean North American and European?) and whose work, unlike their predecessors of past generations of Mexican artists is being classified as "not readily identifiable as Mexican". Does this mean that for these artists the ethnic has indeed become 'a prison' from which they must flee in order to gain entry into the contemporary art world?

¹¹⁶ "Informed by twentieth-century art historical legacies such as conceptualism, which are being re-examined not only in Mexico, but worldwide by a younger generation of artists, the work also refers to popular culture, urban life, and current political issues, but does so in a way that is not readily identifiable as Mexican... In large part, this [2006 as first time a group exhibition of artists from Mexico has been shown at Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago] is because Mexican artists have only recently developed their work in dialogue with contemporary avant-garde international practices, consciously moving away from the traditions of Mexican muralism, folk arts and neo-Mexicanism that was prevalent in the 1980s." (Rodrigues Widholm 2007, 10).

The Third Havana Biennial

In 2007, Walter D. Mignolo asserted that Euro-American intellectuals never did, and still do not care much about debating “modernity and tradition,” at least not in the way this debate is an urgent priority in Latin America and other places in the South, like India, Africa, Japan and other cases he discusses in “Coloniality: The Darker Side of Modernity”.

Because the idea of modernity was built as solely European and, in that argument, there was and is just a ‘singular’ modernity,[footnote 17] it engendered a series of latecomers and wannabes (e.g., alternative, peripheral, subaltern, altermodernities). All of which reproduce the vexing question on ‘modernity and tradition’, a question you do not find much debated among Euro-American intellectuals. For that very reason, the debates about ‘modernity and tradition’ were and still are a concern, mainly, of intellectuals from the non-European (and US) world (Mignolo 2007, 43)

Perhaps this is one of the reasons behind the difference in title between two major 1989 exhibitions, contributing to why Martin named his exhibition *Magiciens de la Terre*, and the 3rd Havana Biennial¹¹⁷ -- an exhibition which opened just months later, and also claimed to be one of the first truly international contemporary art exhibitions -- was titled with the theme *Tradition and Contemporaneity*. Mignolo goes on to say that modernity is not such a contested term in the North as it is in the South, nor is it a radical act to critique it there, because the North does not acknowledge its full role as protagonist in “the crimes and violence justified in the name of modernity,” (Mignolo 2007, 43) another name for coloniality (aka “the consequences of modernity”). Instead, for the most part, the intellectual system of the North carries on as if modernity is a linear project, in which the West or North is far ahead of all other regions of the world. Given this definition and the difference of perspective of the curators of these two 1989 exhibitions, perhaps we can begin to understand the role location played in each exhibition and the resulting two very different strategies for viewing and understanding a new genre of world art.

¹¹⁷ I will refer to the Third Havana Biennial as HB3.

Both *Magiciens* and HB3 were pioneers in their field in that they presented new strategies for viewing non-Western art, they both employed research strategies before and during the exhibition in the form of ongoing dialogue. But a major difference is that the latter HB3 deliberately set out to be one of the first truly global art exhibitions as a project outside of the art and culture system of the North.

In her review of the 2011 book *Making Art Global (Part 1): The Third Havana Biennial*, British art historian Isobel Whitelegg notes the conceptual work which the Afterall Series conducts by beginning the exhibition series of Making Art Global with the less-often cited HB3 rather than *Magiciens*, the more recognized landmark exhibition of the era. “Building on Cuba’s established position as a centre for the arbitration of non-hegemonic world networks, and its historical contribution to the definition of the term ‘Third World’, Rachel Weiss makes the case for recognising HB3 as a pioneer worthy of close study and in dialogue with other major identity exhibitions, as an event that “started to draw up ‘a map of the world that had not existed’. (Whitelegg 2012, 373).

The usefulness of re-examining HB3 and bringing it more out of the shadows and into the mainstream of exhibition histories hinged upon these three initial points: the radical positioning of Cuba outside the European and North American art system, the new world map it proposed, and an experimental strategy for presenting non-contemporary art from other traditions alongside contemporary art (the latter different from the strategies employed by *Magiciens*). Equally as important, HB3 was the first of the Havana Biennials and one of the first major exhibitions to stray from the idea of categorising artists by nationality or national pavilions, and to do away with prizes awarded.¹¹⁸ These were traditions set in place since the Venice Biennial had begun in the previous century, traditions which even the Havana Biennial followed in its first two editions. For HB3, instead the exhibition was organised into thematic “nucleos” or nuclei, although within these groupings the exhibition did not completely abandon categorizing artists by nationality – a number of artworks were shown under national themes, while several of

¹¹⁸ Luis Camnitzer describes this on page 206 of his essay in the Making Art Global book.

the exhibition galleries presented artists from many different countries. As the nuclei of HB3 were spread out into different venues around Havana, some, like the largest and most ambitious, subtitled *Tres Mundos*¹¹⁹ featured artists from dozens of different countries, while others featured several clusters of nationally or regionally based themes (*Núcleo 1* included sections on Latin American Textiles, Cuban Lithography, and Calligraphy in Contemporary Arab Painting; *Núcleo 2* included Mexican Dolls and African Wire Toys; *Núcleo 3* contained subthemes Messages from South Africa, We Love You, Paraguay (a pan-Latino presentation of politically themed work), Censored Photographs from Chile and The Tradition of Humour, a showing of young Cuban artists).

HB3 aimed to create an equal space of dialogue between artists from a large portion of the world, from a perspective that was grounded in the times as unabashedly third world and of the global South, concerned with South-South interactions and an international socialist narrative. The exhibition was created with a considerably smaller budget and with a smaller infrastructure than later versions of the Biennial and then *Magiciens*, by contrast, could not afford to fund the assistance of overseas artists at the exhibition (Weiss et al 2011, 13). Despite its budget and relative newness as an entity, HB3 has been lauded by critics and supporters as one of the most original and pioneering editions of the biennial for several reasons. Two-hundred and fifty-four artists from fifty-four countries were represented in the show, from Africa, the Middle East, Latin America and the Caribbean. It was most likely the first time artists and local themes from Lebanon, Mexico, El Salvador and Egypt had been exhibited in the same constellation of galleries, under the same exhibition title. The work of artists from these places, however, were not included in mutual themes or even in the same galleries, and the representation of artists from each country reflected other centres and peripheries from within the regions. Of these four places, Mexico and Egypt were most represented with ten or more artists each featured in the exhibition from these two larger countries with more of a presence in the regional art and culture scenes of the times (Weiss et al 2011, 90-5). Only one artist was

¹¹⁹ Three Worlds

listed as from Lebanon: Mona Hatoum, the Palestinian artist, who was born in Lebanon to Palestinian parents, but does not identify as Lebanese (Hatoum 2014). One Salvadoran artist, Jesus Romero Galdámez, was featured in the gallery themed We Love You, Paraguay.

While *Magiciens* displayed artists in what appeared to be neo-colonialist relationship to each other on the gallery floors, HB3 placed art from three popular craft traditions together in one nuclei, including wood carvings of Simon Bolivar, paper mache traditional dolls from Mexico, and wire toys from Africa, some made by children.

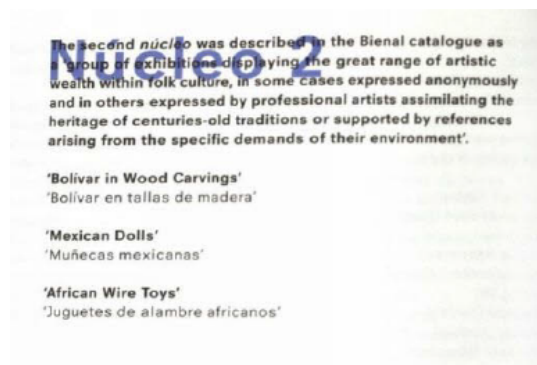


Image 2a. Núcleo 2 of the Third Havana Biennale (1989).

The Mexican dolls exhibit included objects designed by Mexican visual artists and created by artisans, creating a material dialogue between two art histories which coexist in Mexico: local folk traditions and contemporary practices by renowned artists such as Francisco Toledo.



Image 2b. 'Mexican Dolls' image at the Third Havana Biennale (1989).

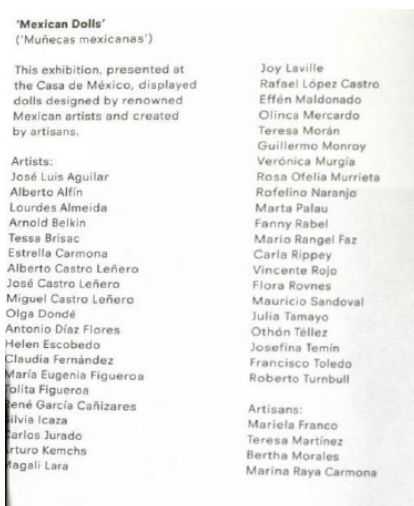


Image 2c. 'Mexican Dolls' exhibition text from the Third Havana Biennale (1989).

The experimental approach contrasted with the display narrative created around Mexican craft in *Magiciens*. Examples of *alebrijes*, the Mexican craft art that is brightly coloured fantastical animal sculptures fashioned from paper mache and carved wood, were displayed directly adjacent to four television screens from a new media work by French

artist Daniel Buren, as if to place the modern technology of European art in dialogue with the colourful craft of the third world.

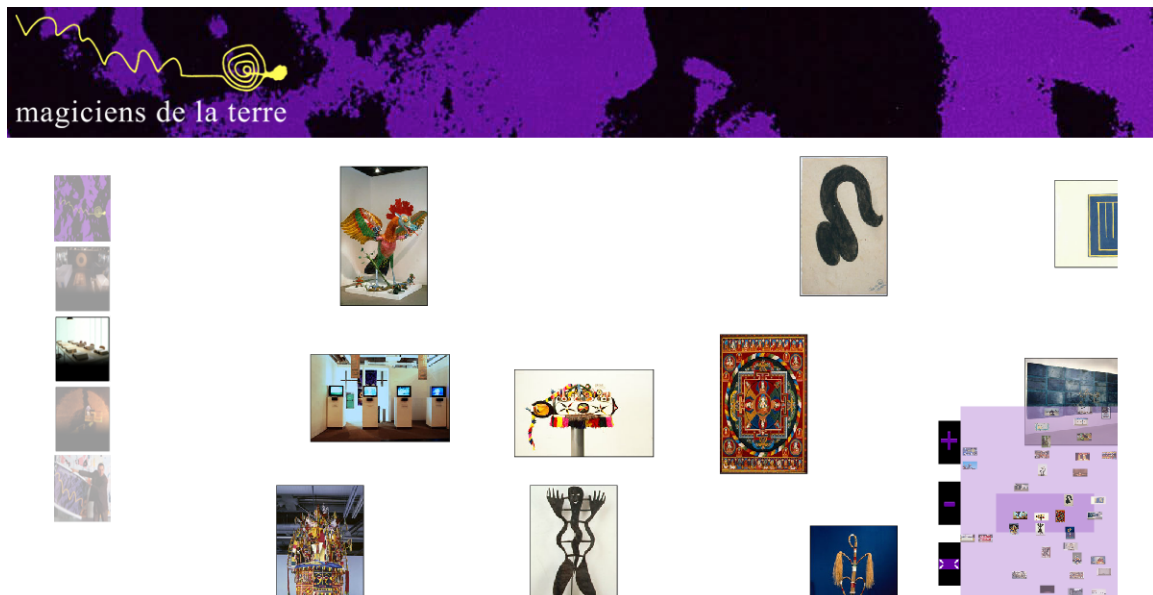
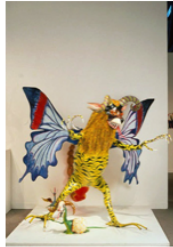


Image 2d. Adjacent works by Felipe Linares and Daniel Buren in the layout plan for the Georges Pompidou Centre in *Magiciens de la Terre* (1989).

The exhibition text for each work further contrasted the agency allowed (or denied) the contrasting artists and practices. One line describes the thirty-five objects on display, below the artist credit for Felipe Linares, a descendant of Pedro Linares, an urban Mexico City artist who invented the *alebrije* in the 1930s after a vision of these fantastical creatures in a fever-induced dream and sold the first *alebrijes* in urban market places; the tradition later became fused with rural traditions from the Mexican state of Oaxaca (Anaya 2001, 14).



Felipe Linares

Mexique



35 *Alebrijes*, 1989
Papier mâché, H: de 60 à 200 cm
Fonds national d'art contemporain,
Château d'Oiron, France & coll. part.

Ces monstres renouvellent la tradition mexicaine de crânes et de squelettes réalisés pour la célébration des fêtes de la Toussaint, le 1^{er} novembre.

© Centre Pompidou, Bibliothèque Kandinsky

Image 2e. Exhibition text for Felipe Linares at the Georges Pompidou Centre in *Magiciens de la Terre* (1989).

Instead of describing this popular art born out of hybrid conditions and an urban context, the exhibition text locates the work in the context of a religious ritual:

Ces monstres renouvellent la tradition mexicaine de crânes et de squelettes réalisés pour la célébration des fêtes de la Toussaint, le 1^{er} novembre.¹²⁰

In a strikingly different manner, the text for Buren's piece emphasises his agency as a creator "Daniel Buren himself has interviewed many of the artists..." who exerts his actions not only over the other artists in the exhibition but also over the audience, as he "forced" visitors to pass in between the screens upon exiting the exhibition.¹²¹

¹²⁰ Translated by google translate as: "These monsters renew the Mexican tradition of skulls and skeletons made for the celebration of the feast of All Saints on November 1."

¹²¹ The text reads, "Daniel Buren a lui-même interviewé un grand nombre des artistes présents lors du montage de l'exposition (moniteur 2). Un spectacle de magicien de music-hall représentait sa vision de Magiciens de la terre (moniteur 4). Les visiteurs étaient obligés de passer entre les moniteurs à la sortie de l'exposition." (Poppi 1991, 87)



Daniel Buren

France



Quatre moniteurs vidéo diffusant respectivement de gauche à droite :

1- 29 bandes de 8,7 cm chacune vues à la télévision, 1989

2- *Les Magiciens de la terre* vus par eux-mêmes. *Questions*, 1989

3- *Les Magiciens de la terre* vus à la télévision, 1989

4- *Les Magiciens de la terre* vus par Daniel Buren, 1989

Daniel Buren a lui-même interviewé un grand nombre des artistes présents lors du montage de l'exposition (moniteur 2). Un spectacle de magicien de music-hall représentait sa vision de *Magiciens de la terre* (moniteur 4). Les visiteurs étaient obligés de passer entre les moniteurs à la sortie de l'exposition.

© Centre Pompidou, Bibliothèque Kandinsky

Image 2f. Exhibition text for Daniel Buren at the Georges Pompidou Centre in *Magiciens de la Terre* (1989).

On this theme of technology and the indigenous, Martin is quoted as defending his exhibition against comparisons with William Rubin's '*Primitivism' and Twentieth Century Art* exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York (1984), exclaiming, "I am really against the assumption (underlying in a way also Rubin's exhibition) that we have in fact destroyed all cultures with Western technology." (Poppi 1991, 87). As I mentioned in the previous section, Martin was also criticised for omitting details about indigenous artists who used technology in their projects.

In 2007, Miguel Leonardo Rojas-Soletto wrote a thesis focusing not on the contemporary art of the Havana Biennial, but on its reception and phenomenon as a cultural expression of the global South. In her review of the *Making Art Global* book on HB3, Whitelegg notes that Rojas-Sotelo's work goes uncited in the *Afterall* publication, as does his discussion of the two 1989 exhibitions. Comparing *Magiciens* and HB3, Rojas-Sotelo

describes the discrepancy between the recognition and reception of the two exhibitions: Magiciens is much more discussed as globally significant in the 2000s discussions of global art than it's Southern counterpart, even though HB3 featured more artists from a wider range of the globe.¹²² He describes HB3 as having more artists from 'elsewhere' than any other contemporary exhibition, calling attention to the irony that this periphery actually constitutes a majority. He describes how the history of HB3 was subsequently written and re-written through the lens of Euro-centrism as way to "replace the current cosmopolitan rationale of the international art scene with a planetary paradigm that would no longer allow Western exhibitions to systematically ignore 80 percent of the surface of the globe." (Rojas Sotelo 93).¹²³

Returning to Mignolo's assessment of the difference in intellectual concerns between South and North, perhaps one explanation for the lack of attention paid to HB3 was due not only to its being outside the North American and European art and culture system, but also outside its intellectual concerns and logic. We can see this idea illustrated in a parallel way, with the presence and representation of Egyptian artist Ahmed Nawar's work in HB3.

¹²² Rojas-Sotelo writes: "...in recent discussions of the global significance of art events in 1989, Havana is not mentioned, despite the fact that it had proportionately more artists coming from elsewhere (250 from 54 countries) than any other event at the time, even more, comparatively, than much discussed Magiciens de la Terre (100 artists from 50 Countries)."

¹²³ Full quote: "Jean Hubert Martin's endeavor with Magiciens de la Terre was to replace the current cosmopolitan rationale of the international art scene with a planetary paradigm that would no longer allow Western exhibitions to systematically ignore 80 percent of the surface of the globe. Many articles at the time of the Biennale had intentions of comparing the two, but they were not, however, that successful. See: Pía Barragán, "III Bienal de la Habana. La Bienal del Tercer Mundo. Entrevista a Pierre Restany." *Arte en Colombia*, No 43, (February, 1990), 56-57; Guy Brett, "Venice, Paris, Kassel, São Paulo and Habana" *Third Text*, No. 20 (autumn, 1992), 13-22. Recent articles and essays obscure Havana's participation in the debate. See for example: Johanne Lamoureux, "From form to platform: The politics of representation and the representation of politics" *Art Journal*, Spring, 2005. 65-73."



Image 2g. Exhibition text and image of Ahmed Nawar's work at the Third Havana Biennale (1989).

The exhibition text about his work reads, “Egyptian artist Ahmed Nawar’s abstract painting brought together the decorative traditions of Islamic visual art and European abstraction.” (Weiss 2012, 153). His work was featured in Nucleo 1, paired with Colombian artist Eduardo Ramirez Villamizar’s large steel sculptures which paid homage to pre-Colombian art, as well as Cuban artist José Bedia’s similarly themed drawings and installations. Together, they illustrated the exhibition’s theme of the traditional coexisting in the same time and space as the contemporary. This was just the kind of work -- and thesis about art histories -- which was purposefully left out of *Magiciens de la Terre* by Martin.

Rojas-Sotelo includes several brief comments on the participation of Arab artists from the Middle East in HB3, starting with his recounting of a discussion with one of the Centro

Wifredo Lam's staff who worked on the research and organising of the exhibition, Margarita Sanchez Prieto. The oral history she relates shows the great cultural stretch involved in bringing these worlds together, along with some of the cultural themes translated through artworks in the creation of this new constellation, in which there was little local knowledge of Asian and Arab worlds.¹²⁴

She goes on to point out that some artists from the Middle East went on to become "central to the world of art" after showing work in the Havana Biennial. Rojas-Sotelo says she is referring specifically to Shirin Neshat, here, who is an Iranian artist and not actually an Arab artist, although has shown work in many exhibitions on the Middle East and Arab art (Rojas-Sotelo 2009, 108). Curator Nelson Herrera Ysla also described how the research team relied not only upon research into local networks, but also heavily upon international networks, using connections from organisations in the US and Europe to gain knowledge and access to art from the Middle East, such as the Arab Institute in Paris and the Asia Studies Center in the US (Rojas-Sotelo 2009, 176).

Rojas-Sotelo demonstrates how even after the third edition, the Havana Biennial continued to function as a forum for "alternative" and "peripheral" art narratives, including those on the Middle East. Quoting from the Fourth Havana Biennial catalog, he writes:

In the "Introducción al Arte Contemporáneo Árabe" (Introduction to Arab Contemporary Art), Ibrahim Ben Hossain Alaoui stated that the divide East-West and the orientalist view that was brought into the mainstream of art history at the same time challenged and normalized Middle Eastern art historical narratives." (Rojas-Sotelo 2009, 260)

Rojas-Sotelo marvels at the idea of a fluid Muslim aesthetic that spanned across national boundaries in the Arab world, finding it remarkable that in the 1950s there was evidence

¹²⁴ In Prieto's words: "Cuba was leading the non-aligned movement (NAM) during the 1980s and that gave us the opportunity to ask the right questions. To ask about those segregated areas of the world we did not have any contact with before. To me personally, the challenge was Asia and the Arab world rather than Africa. I had grown up as a white Catholic; however, we had the opportunity to know the syncretism of African cultures, because of Lam and because of our own racial and cultural composition as society." (Rojas-Sotelo 2009, 107)

of “an ‘interarab’ identity where in development, artists from the region were in constant flux and exchange.” (p.549)

In a narrative pieced together from individual experiences and a few documents, we can see the beginnings of a dialogue set up between Latin America and the Arab world through the mediation of art and culture. The Havana Biennale began with a structure that made this kind of dialogue possible, between two previously segregated areas of the world. As the Biennial continues, so does this dialogue, albeit within a structure that has radically changed its politics and strategies. In her insightful thesis on a neighbouring exhibition, *The Ghetto Biennale*, Caitlin Lennon describes the changing nature of the Havana Biennial’s theoretical framework and its less-radical positioning within the larger art world over the past twenty-five years. Her account of the Havana Biennial history sheds light on the 20th century phenomena that came to be understood as the third world biennial, and has come full-circle, from radical “anti-globalization” critique to institutional cannon-making machine of global art, which feels slightly out of place with its colonial undertones in decolonial times.

The Havana Biennial was conceived as an open space in which contemporary artists, critics, curators and scholars from Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Latin America and the Middle East could meet and engage with each other free from the confines of dominant ideologies. While utopian in idea, the event was also pragmatic in that it created a platform for research and promotion at a time when marginalized artists were unknown beyond their local contexts. In the editions of the Havana Biennial he curated, Mosquera saw the Third World as a separate cultural form capable of ushering in a new global era... [which] would not entirely reject western culture, but would transform it beyond all recognition.... The Havana Biennial is the avant-garde model on which the worldwide explosion of biennials in the 1990s was based. The biennial’s ability to create equality from the discriminatory limitations of the art world was celebrated and frequently repeated. It was at these radical sites of interaction that the transformation of intercultural communication was believed to occur. (Lennon 2009, 14-19) ¹²⁵

¹²⁵ Lennon continues, “Many have criticized biennials, including Havana’s, because they frequently stiffen into their own centers of power involving new gestures of inclusion and exclusion. Mosquera writes that, after only a few exhibitions, the Havana Biennial had become a paradoxical global event. Its once egalitarian mission had become authoritarian, bureaucratic, and at times, repressive. George Baker has suggested that many of the larger biennials now seem to adhere to the logic of spectacle inflicting “phenomenological violence” upon their spectators and creating an increasingly uniform aesthetic experience... Rasheed Araeen argues that in embracing multiculturalism, Western art institutions, including the biennial, merely camouflage the fact that they are “still dominated and controlled by the Eurocentric structures of modernity.” ... While the biennial prides itself on the advancement of dialogue between global cultures, what we are witnessing, writes art historian Salah Hassan, “is not the ultimate recognition of

Lennon's account touches on the full range of key issues associated with the third world biennial – from the utopic idealism necessary to start such a project to the trap of ultimately re-constituting the original system it sought to counter (repeating hierarchies of racism, Euro-centrism, neo-colonialism, and the like). Lennon's account is corroborated by New York Times art critic Holland Cotter, who wrote of the 2015 Havana Biennial's changed audience and intent since its beginning in 1984.¹²⁶

Returning to the question posed earlier regarding the possibility of the art and culture world being re-located from the centre to the periphery, e.g. from the South to the North, perhaps this is exactly part of the story of what has occurred with the Havana Biennale. The positioning of Havana as a centre in the Latin American art world can be understood as a kind of alchemy when periphery turns to centre. In this kind of transformation, where one element would be transformed into its opposite, perhaps we should ask, who stands to benefit as power and value change hands, as one past becomes the present?

Globalism and the Geographic Turn

The so-called geographic turn in contemporary art is a methodology for incorporating artists from the South into exhibitions, collections, institutions and markets of the North. By these means, it also became a methodology for incorporating these artists into a Eurocentric history of art (which was labelled as Art History in general, a misnomer).

plurality of history but a return to Western grand narratives in the guise of asserting 'cultural difference.'"60 Through its call for democracy, the biennial has created a system that enacts inequality."¹²⁶ Cotter wrote in 2015: "The biennial was not originally created with that [international, North American] crowd in mind. Founded in 1984, it was devoted to artists who found no welcome in heavily subsidized European extravaganzas like the Venice Biennale and Documenta. In those pre-globalist days, the Havana show provided a platform not only to artists from Cuba but also from Asia, Africa and South America. Working with a minute budget, it was conceived as a kind of anti-spectacle, with a vision of art as a loose and elusive social experiment, not a brand to sell... That approach has come and gone over the decades..." (Cotter 2015, C1)

This is exemplified by Sara Fanelli's commissioned work for the Tate Modern (Sara Fanelli for Tate, 2006), as part of the Tate Artist Timeline that was displayed prominently in the institutions concourse walls on Level 3 and 5 of the museum, and claimed to provide "a glance at the highlights of twentieth-century art" (Tate Modern 2007). A closer look at this timeline reveals that it is not an accurate chronological or representative re-counting of twentieth century art, but instead of a re-counting of the art that was most important to British art history between 1900 and 2000. If the same map were to be presented in the context of art history from any other country, the content and chronology would have to be changed drastically to depict the influential artists and movements of the same period.

Miguel Amado, arts researcher and curator of the Portuguese Pavilion at the 2013 Venice Biennial, understands the effect of globalisation on art history to be the most important shift in the 20th and 21st century: a change in course from a history preoccupied with chronology to one preoccupied by geography. In his research on art from Lusophone Africa funded by Independent Curators International, Amado describes this shift in a journal entry published on the website's research section (Amado 2014). He begins the entry with an explanation of what he describes as the 'geographic turn' in art history. The protagonist of his story is the Western museum, its collections and exhibitions, from 1936 onwards.

Art history has always been understood as a time-based narrative. The most iconic illustration of this is probably the famous timeline/chart drawn in 1936 by Alfred H. Barr Jr., the first director of New York's Museum of Modern Art. The chronologically oriented approach to artistic practices that has dominated the 20th and 21st centuries is largely attributable to the massive influence of this single institution.

But a new understanding of artistic practices, emphasizing geography over chronology, has been emerging in recent years. Western museums, having realized that their programs disproportionately emphasized artists born or living in the United States (mostly New York and Los Angeles) and certain Western European countries (the United Kingdom, Germany, and France), are increasingly presenting and collecting the work of non-Western artists. (Amado 2014).¹²⁷

¹²⁷ Amado describes the Tate Modern as an example of a canonic centre that is turning it's attention to non-Western art: "For example, a lack of geographical diversity was the main criticism faced by the Tate in regard to its collection when Tate Modern opened. Therefore, an acquisitions policy was put in motion

In this description, the museum plays the active role. The key words here are ‘iconic’ and ‘Western’. We are to understand that this protagonist – a.k.a. the institution -- stays on top of the game by addressing criticism with new policies and novel displays. The objects of these policies and displays is the art of non-Westerners, art from everywhere outside of the centre, or to borrow a term Charles Esche, Okwui Enwezor and many others have used, art from elsewhere(s). What Amado omits from this narrative is the mention of any role of museums outside the West. The active roles of ‘museum’ and ‘curator’ in this narrative are confined to the Western Art-institution, and the passive role is delegated to the object of study: art from Lusophone Africa in this case. The latter here represents a part of the art from elsewhere(s), playing the role of the new -- a thing that can be acquired to help the museum to realize its misperception of time and history as being linear, singular. The world-wide currents of globalisation cause a change in perception of time and space -- within the art world, art history and everyday life.¹²⁸ As this art from these elsewheres comes into contact with collections, museum missions and discourses of display, and is eventually consumed by this system, a new process of institutionalisation of non-Western art becomes a necessary part of globalization.¹²⁹

Amado’s version of the time vs. geography globalization argument echoes through various art methodologies and approaches found in Europe and the US by both institutions and independent curators as they expand their tastes from Eurocentric-dominant art to a kind of “world art”. The direction of this expansion appears increasingly to start from one centre, reaching its tentacles, often in the form of

aiming at addressing that. In the meantime, shortcomings could be circumvented not only via an innovative collection display model but also via the temporary exhibitions program.” (Amado 2014)

¹²⁸ Elaborating on this point in the first section of his essay, Amado writes: “The “geographic turn” has been enabled by the globalization process, which consists of the suppression of spatio-temporal limits in the Western hemisphere and the tearing open of new civilizational horizons.”

¹²⁹ Artist and Academic Victor Manuel Rodríguez (part of the artist group *Yo no soy esa* (I am not she) brought this theme to my attention when reviewing my proposal for an exchange between the artist groups of this thesis (see appendix), also as part of an ICI run seminar in Bogotá, when he asked me to consider how my own work with underground artist groups might place them in the radar of the Art Institution and what they could stand to loose with that transaction.

representatives such as curators and representations of exhibitions, collections and institutions, into every far-away nook and cranny of the world. But for Amado, the opposite seems to be true: the “realignment of art history” (Amado 2004) has a causal relationship with undoing the logic of centre/periphery.¹³⁰ Furthering this idea of historic events being contextualised in ‘new ways’ Amado describes a comparing of diverse modernisms that accompanies the geographic turn: the Western museum is “finally looking at alternative modernisms through a comparative perspective.”

This chapter will examine the application of these popular beliefs about geography and art, charting three popular assertions which Amado voices: 1) the supposed abandoning of a preoccupation with chronological linear history (and with its with temporalities) within art history 2) the disintegrating of a ‘one-way power direction’ between the old colonial powers and the rest of the world, and thus the undoing (or decline in use) of the centre/periphery binary model and 3) the comparing of diverse “modernities” as a part of a geographic turn in contemporary art and visual history.

A useful starting point for a deeper look into these three elements can be found in Anibal Quijano’s concept of the colonality of power, a term he uses to demonstrate how colonial hierarchies regarding race, culture and region are still fundamental to our current world system. Quijano understands the 21st century state of globalisation as the era of global capitalism, defined by a system built around Eurocentrism, at the root of which is the configuration of centre/periphery model, first coined by Raúl Prebisch in 1959, and referring to the period of global capitalism that began at the end of World War II (Quijano 2000, 439). “From then on,” writes Quijano, global capitalism “was colonial/modern and Eurocentered.” (Quijano 2000, 439). The three prominent elements of Eurocentrism he outlines are as follows:

¹³⁰ “Today, events that were once defined through a Eurocentric point of view are being contextualized differently, because the one-way power relationship that defined center and periphery is disintegrating.” (Amado 2004)

The confrontation between the historical experience and the Eurocentric perspective on knowledge makes it possible to underline some of the more important elements of Eurocentrism: (a) a peculiar articulation between dualism (capital-precapital, Europe-non-Europe, primitive-civilized, traditional-modern, etc.) and a linear, one directional evolutionism from some state of nature to modern European society; (b) the naturalization of the cultural differences between human groups by means of their codification with the idea of race; and (c) the distorted-temporal relocation of all those differences by relocating non-Europeans in the past. (Quijano 2000, 532-3)

In this brief summary, Quijano demonstrates how hierarchies designed originally for monetary gains have become translated to a general and now ubiquitous to a distorted version of history and geography, now so ubiquitous that it is often internalised as an assumed “natural” history. These same binaries, coded cultural differences and distorted temporalities that he identifies as proponents of Euro-centrism, are primary to many of the larger debates in contemporary art history from the past thirty-some years. Quijano tells us that globalisation, as well as the Euro-centrism it is based upon, reconfigures three concepts: time, difference, and the cross section between binaries and linear evolution from the ancient to the modern.

To what extent do discussions in contemporary art deal with/engage with the reconfiguring of these three ideas? In the introduction to the 2011 anthology *Globalization and Contemporary Art*, Jonathan Harris reminds of that globalisation functions in a similar manner to the categories of modernism or renaissance which came before it; the phenomenon of globalisation has permeated the art-world and its languages, while referring to a larger world system of organization which is Eurocentric and stems from a colonially privileged West. Harris writes that this legacy of a central power unit remains uncertain and unstable.

“ ‘Global’ has entered into art jargon..” writes curator özge Ersoy in her 2010 thesis work examining the potential impact of the new branch of a Guggenheim currently under construction in Dubai. Emphasizing the influence of global capitalism on the ‘new geographies’ of the 21st century art world, she observes that the “rhetoric of

contemporary art is associated with art markets more than ever.”¹³¹ The physical geographies which Ersoy refers to are in fact, each as old as any other territory, each complete with its own millennial art histories and hybrid visual cultural traditions. But the idea that these geographies are referred to as ‘new’ signals a political re-configuring, re-defining of these diverse spaces under the concept of difference – reminiscent of the act of colonising a new terrain. In this case what is at stake is not only aesthetic but social and political by nature. In a 2008 anthology on postcolonial art histories, Kobena Mercer recounts the troubled legacies of colonial categories by turning our attention to the possibility of dismantling dichotomous thought around the modern and the indigenous within the art and culture system of the 21st century.¹³²

These examples reveal a similar thesis: front and centre in 21st century art are the issues revolving around the reconfigurations of time, difference, and the old logic built of binaries and linear narratives. The rhetoric and discourses of colonialism are key to the re-evaluation and re-thinking of systems in our current time. Quijano’s account of colonialism from his foundational essay, “Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America” (2000), maps out an understanding of the cross-section of race, temporalities, culture and territories within the larger coloniality of power systems, beginning with the idea of diversity, describing the power dynamic behind the act of asserting a system of homogenising nomenclature over a diverse number of cultures.¹³³ Simultaneously, as the

¹³¹ She continues: “Many critics consider the emergence of new art markets, abundance of biennials, and expansion of art museums into new geographies as part of larger economic projects. In addition, contemporary art moves from aesthetic concerns to social and political issues, and from Euro-American codes of art history to politics of diversity and difference.” (Ersoy 2008)

¹³² “The one-sided view of modernity as an ‘alien invader’ threatening to level or obliterate the cultural differences of non-western traditions (which therefore required paternalist protection) not only harboured proprietorial assumptions about modernism as an exclusive ‘possession’ of the West, but also erased the agency of adaptation and resistance on the part of the colonised that made the lived experience of colonialism a contradictory phenomenon on all sides. Dismantling the dichotomous extremes of either/or thinking that had regarded the West solely as a corrupting influence which rendered the modern artistic expression of native artists ‘impure’ and ‘inauthentic’, analytic methods drawn from post-colonial studies cast fresh light on the creative opportunities made possible by the contradictions of the colonial encounter.” (Mercer 2008, 16)

¹³³ “...in the moment that the Iberians conquered, named, and colonized America (whose Northern region, North America, would be colonized by the British a century later), they found a great number of different peoples, each with its own history, language, discoveries and cultural products, memory and identity. The

Eurocentric nomenclature of “Indian” and “Black” were being imposed with the erosion of terms for the diversity it sought to erase, a new identity and entity was being constructed by usurping the advanced technology of the conquered people.¹³⁴ Native communities were not only disposed of their land (physical territory), and their diverse identities (historical territory), but also of their inventions, the terrain of ideas, and robbed of their place in history as active agents and developers of the science of the modern. (Quijano 2000, 552).¹³⁵

Building upon these happenings in specific places and time, the idea became hegemonic and therefore ‘naturalised’ this imposed categorising of racial hierarchies¹³⁶ and the logic of Eurocentrism expanded to a flawed logic of universal dimensions along with the development of international capitalism:

What is notable about this is not that the Europeans imagined and thought of themselves and the rest of the species in that way – something not exclusive to Europeans—but the fact that they were capable of spreading and establishing that historical perspectives hegemonic within the new intersubjective universe of the global model of power. (Quijano 2000, 215-32)¹³⁷

most developed and sophisticated of them were the Aztecs, Mayas, Chimus, Aymaras, Incas, Chichas, and so on. Three hundred years later, all of them had become merged into a single identity: Indians. This new identity was racial, colonial, and negative. The same happened with the peoples forcefully brought from Africa as slaves: Ashantis, Yorubas, Zulus, Congos, Bacongors, and others. In the span of three hundred years, all of them were Negroes or blacks.” (Quijano 2000, 551-2)

¹³⁴ “the constitution of Europe as a new historic entity/identity was made possible, in the first place, through the free labour of the American Indians, blacks, and mestizos, with their advanced technology in mining and agriculture, and with their products such as gold, silver, potatoes, tomatoes, and tobacco.” (Quijano 2000, 552)

¹³⁵ He writes: “the resultant from the history of colonial power had, in terms of the colonial perception, two decisive implications. The first is obvious: peoples were dispossessed of their own and singular historical identities. The second... their new racial identity, colonial and negative, involved the plundering of their place in the history of the cultural production of humanity. From then on, they were inferior races, capable only of producing inferior cultures.” (Quijano 2000, 552)

¹³⁶ “the Europeans persuaded themselves from the middle of the seventeenth century, but above all during the eighteenth century, that in some way they had autoproduced themselves as a civilization, at the margin of history initiated with America, culminating an independent line that began with Greece as the only original source. Furthermore, they concluded that they were naturally (i.e. racially) superior to the rest of the world, since they had conquered everyone and had imposed their dominance on them.” (Quijano 2000, 552)

¹³⁷ “The fact that Western Europeans will imagine themselves to be the culmination of a civilizing trajectory from a state of nature leads them also to think of themselves as the moderns of humanity and its history, that is, as the new, and at the same time, most advanced of the species. But since they attribute the rest of the species to a category by nature inferior and consequently anterior, belonging to the past in the progress of the species, the Europeans imagine themselves as the exclusive bearers, creators, and protagonists of that modernity.” (ibid).

Thus, the linear narrative out of which time, difference and binary comparisons were configured and rooted in colonial times, are still tethered to the present. It is this kind of flawed universalism, linked to modernity that Mercer refers to when he writes, “the aesthetics of ‘authenticity’ ... foreclosed recognition of modernity as a universal condition that had taken root in diverse cultural locations around the world.” (Mercer 2008, 16)

This theme of deconstructing universalism through engaging with the specifics of territory has preoccupied many curators and thinkers like Mercer, especially during the first decade of the 2000s.¹³⁸ Over and over again we see the appearance of two deictic indexical terms used to designate and describe the territory outside the centre: modernities and elsewheres. Employed to do an almost impossible task of signifying, or coding a huge range of diverse places and conditions, they simultaneously work to define the peripheries by what they are not, fitting them into the binaries and concepts of (Western) Art History. By using Quijano’s analysis of colonialism as a base point, I propose a look into these kind of territorialisation and re-territorialisation processes that have occurred in the history of place-making through exhibitions.

Conclusion

The two 1989 exhibitions set into place the dominant patterns and ways of thinking about art and place within a global capitalist setting, leading to a kind of formulaic coding of the global, with hierarchies and debates imported from a past colonial era. Though these exhibitions originated in the geographic North, they were meant for a diverse global audience, and influenced both exhibition history and art history of the South. Between 1989 and 2015, these models were instrumental in the definition and display of the global South in the idea of region-as-concept which became central, underlying theme in the identity exhibitions of the 1990s and early 2000s. Identity exhibitions were a strain of the

¹³⁸ For example, Sarat Maharaj spoke about what he terms “cutting universalism down to size” in his talk as a part of Exhibitions and the World at Large, a public symposium organised by Afterall Journal in collaboration with TrAIN (Centre for Research on Transnational Art, Identity & Nation) and hosted by Tate Britain on Friday 3 April 2009, 9.30 – 18.00.

kind of multiculturalism with roots in the cultural and human rights movements of the 1970s, institutionally distorted in the late 80s and early 90s, with 1989 as a particular marker of change in the thinking about representing world images on a large scale. In 1989 much of the pre-shaping of ideas about art and culture from the global South became fixed in a way that conflated artists and art with a visual symbol of their native region, almost as the general public might read a news image about a far-away land, and mistake it for a cultural truth, while side-lining the perspective, choices, or even existence of the artist-protagonist behind the lens.

The 1989 exhibition models were so strong that they became invisible, as hegemonic devices that moved from the frame of the identity exhibition to the so-called geographic turn. This is illustrated in the Tate Artist Timeline that uncritically displays this kind of model as engrained the telling of European art history as if it were global art history. The contrasting multiculturalist models of HB3 (multiculturalism as South-South diversity) and Magiciens (multiculturalism as reification of the ancient/modern colonial binary) were also both formulaic and essentialising, the latter two qualities facilitating their gradual consumption into the larger model of institutional multiculturalism that prevails in the 21st century art-institution. This led to an inversion of models and geographic places: by 2015, the Havana Biennial had become far less radical so much that it appeared more like the Northern Magicien model, while the Venice Biennale experienced a full shift from showcase of Eurocentric old masters to showcase of the global South's new art of the privileged art stars (largely trained in European style and pedagogy). By moving from extremist poles on opposite ends of the spectrum, ironically, the two models came together under the larger banner of the art world's commodified brand of institutional multiculturalism.

Chapter 3

The introduction of the South into the global biennial circuit

Sólo que el burdel es como el aguardiente y como la cárcel y como el hospital; el trabajo está en probarlos, que después de probados, ni quien nos borre la afición que les cobramos, la atracción que en sus devotos ejercen...¹³⁹

Federico Gamboa, 1908, Santa.

During the twenty-five years between the 1989 exhibitions and 2014, the biennial circuit¹⁴⁰ became one of the biggest forces to be reckoned with in the international art scene. More than just a vehicle for art, it became an entity in and of itself, with its own set of rules, its own academic studies, and its own aesthetic, discourse and role in transnational economies. Biennial scholars have compared it to a cloud and a creator of ‘tokenistic art;’ (Verwoert 2010, 185) they have contrasted its ephemerality and vibrancy to the permanence of the slow-moving museum institution. Art fairs, museums, and large exhibitions began to imitate the biennial form, scope and aesthetic as the number of biennials around the world jumped from just a handful (under ten in 1980, most of which were located in the art world centres) to over 300 biennials spread out around the globe by 2011 (Luke 2011). Two constants stand out in the biennials of this period: indexicality¹⁴¹ as a theme in artworks: the trace as a marker of authenticity in the representation of ‘new’ territories and an exhibition aesthetic relying heavily on the white cube, which indicates value, as all of the works appear as if they are for sale on the global art market. Here the white cube aesthetic is used not so much as a symbol of modernity,

¹³⁹ The brothel is like whiskey and like prison and like hospital; the work is in trying them for the first time, but once tasted, no one can erase the passion we extract from them, nor the appeal they inspire in their devotees.. " (author's translation).

¹⁴⁰ I use the term elsewhere in this chapter as part of a critique of the term, to draw attention to the way it inhabits a centre/periphery paradigm which insists upon homogenizing everything non-Western, whether or not it is used in the plural or by curators or publications from the South or North.

¹⁴¹ Following the idea of the indexical symbol in contemporary art described by Mary Ann Doane in her essay *Indexicality: Trace and Sign* (in which she uses Charles Sanders Pierce's taxonomy of three types of signs: icons, indices and symbols), a theme which both critics and artists have used to the extent that it has become a prominent trend in 21st century art. For more, see: Mary Ann Doane, "Indexicality: Trace and Sign: Introduction," *Differences* 18, no. 1 (2007): 1–6.

nor as institutional validation for an artwork's status as an original and noteworthy work of art, but of a code to show worth, like a price tag, marking it as valuable currency in the global art market.

The formation and defining of two genres within this time period – Latin American and Arab contemporary art – were most definitely marked by the biennialisation of the international art world. The number of biennials has multiplied exponentially in these two regions of the world, as arts and culture institutions, galleries, and museums have also increased. As documented in 2012, there are a number of similarities in the representation of these two areas of the world and the new art genres created around them:

Although Arab art and Latin American art are at different historical moments in terms of their global popularity, both have been exhibited in similar ways. Representations of both have been shown in the blockbuster exhibit format,¹⁴² the city-based show curated by a local curator paired with a large European or North American institution,¹⁴³ the large commercial gallery or art fair,¹⁴⁴ and the theme-based show curated by independent curators, sometimes in collaboration with artists.¹⁴⁵ There are similar reductive plans underway for the future of housing and collecting contemporary art in both regions... (Guerrero-Rippberger 2012).

By 2014, renowned contemporary artists from major Arab cities and Latin American cities became internationally known in the biennial circuit, as art stars and representatives of whole generations, genres and cities. Yet with all of these developments, contemporary artists from the global South still found themselves having to perform their regional identity first and foremost, whenever they showed artwork in a large museum or exhibition of the centre. Artists from Lebanon participating in an exhibition at the New York Museum of Modern Art were participating as Arab artists, not as 'artists' like their

¹⁴² The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston's 2004 *Inverted Utopias: Avant-Garde in Latin America*; The British Museum's 2006 *Word into Art: Artists of the Modern Middle East*.

¹⁴³¹⁴³ MoMA PS1's 2002 *Mexico City: An Exhibition about the Exchange Rates of Bodies and Values* curated by Klaus Biesenbach with catalog essays by Cuauhtémoc Medina and Patricia Martín; The Museum of Modern Art in Oxford's 2006 *Out of Beirut* curated by Susan Cotter with Christine Tohme.

¹⁴⁴ Charles Saatchi's 2009 *Unveiled: New Art from the Middle East*; commercial art fairs PINTA, México Arte Contemporáneo and arteaméricas.

¹⁴⁵ *The Disappeared* curated by Laurel Reuter (2006-2010); *Veil* curated by Jananne Al-Ani, David A. Bailey, and Zineb Sedira (2003); *Harem fantasies and the new Scheherazades* curated by Fatima Mernissi and Rose Issa (2003).

peers from Western Europe. In the few instances artists from the Middle East are visible in the archives of the same institution, they are representing their region, primarily in recordings from gallery lectures related to an exhibition called, "Without Boundary: Seventeen Ways of Looking" from 2006.¹⁴⁶ At the Tate Modern in London, the biographies of exhibiting artists from Latin America almost always discuss their home country first, as a method for explaining their work (see, for example, Doris Salcedo¹⁴⁷ and even the more recent solo exhibition of Gabriel Orozco¹⁴⁸).¹⁴⁹ The list of examples like this goes on and on: if you are an artist from the global South (or from one of its diasporas), your nationality, and sometimes even your race, will be a first detail used to position and explain your work. Inevitably, this kind of categorising limits the scope and range of work artists from the global South are allowed to exhibit in these spaces, as well

¹⁴⁶ In 2012 and 2013 on several visits to the MoMA Archives in New York City, I found less than five records of artists from Arab cities and the Middle East, and all of them were related to the exhibition Without Boundary: Seventeen Ways of Looking (2006), and two were unavailable because they were recordings created with equipment incompatible with the listening devices at the archives, namely cd and cassette players (the archives does not share these recordings even if the visitor provides an appropriate listening device). I spoke with archivist, [insert name], who confirmed that these were the only sources in the archive related to artists from the Arab world or diaspora. Although it focuses on Museum documents and records, the MoMA archives describes itself as an internationally important to modern and contemporary art. Its introductory text reads: "The Museum Archives was established in 1989 to collect, organize, preserve, and make accessible documentation concerning the Museum's art-historical and cultural role in the 20th and 21st centuries. It is also an internationally recognized centre of research for primary source material concerning many aspects of modern and contemporary art, including private archives that may be the papers of artists, collectives, galleries, dealers, art historians, critics, etc." (See www.moma.org/learn/resources/archives/index).

¹⁴⁷ Her biography on the Tate Modern website begins with: "Colombian John Clark, "Biennials as Structures for the Writing of Art History: The Asian Perspective," in The Biennial Reader (Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2010).. After completing her BFA at the Universidad de Bogotá in 1980, she went to New York...". See <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/doris-salcedo-2695>.

¹⁴⁸ His biography for his solo show at the Tate Modern begins with: "Creative, playful and inventive, Gabriel Orozco creates art in the streets, his apartment or wherever he is inspired. Born in Mexico but working across the globe," as if to explain why his work may not always be located or informed by Mexico (a common theme among artists from Mexico who are represented at this institution). See <http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibition/gabriel-orozco>.

¹⁴⁹ By contrast, the Tate Modern solo exhibition biography of German artist Sigmar Polke (2014) begins with statement indicating a much more universal importance -- "Sigmar Polke was one of the most insatiably experimental artists of the twentieth century" -- and does not mention his German heritage until the end of his biography, after 4 paragraphs describing the groundbreaking experimentalism of his work (see <http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibition/alibis-sigmar-polke-1963-2010>). The same pattern is followed for biographies for Bill Viola, Damien Hirst, Andrea Fraser, white Israeli artist Omar Fest, and many other artists who are either white, North American, or Western European (see <http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/display/bill-viola>, <http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/display/andrea-fraser>, <http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/display/omer-fast>, <http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibition/damien-hirst>).

as limiting the universality and overall importance the artwork is credited with in the larger, international art world.

Spotlights and Shadows: Towards a Typology of Biennials

In order to attempt categorizing the biennials of the 21st century, which now number in the hundreds and take place across the North and South, perhaps we might begin with questions like these:

- What are some of the specific conditions and histories under which these genres and styles were developed?
- Why has the current biennial system and so-called geographic turn in the art and culture system allowed art from the global South to be understood primarily through its regional context?
- What have artists from the global South given up in exchange for greater international visibility?

In the cases of the creation and definition of art from Arab worlds and Latin America, what themes and aesthetics have dominated the genres and what has been rendered invisible? And how is the idea of the post-colonial being used to understand both art from these and other regions of the global South?

But have these or the myriad of forms, some imitations, others modifications or counter-exhibitions, allowed for a fluid image of cultural identity, in which the visible and invisible aspects fluctuate? There has been much declaration of global tendencies in contemporary art – for example, the narrative that the majority of contemporary art produced in the era of neoliberalism is tied to the mediascape and its constant stream of images and information. But to what extent have large exhibitions revealed to audiences a view of the kinds of specific lines of artistic inquiry developing on the local, national, and regional levels? What have they told us about authenticity, modernism, globalisation and other salient issues, and what has been made invisible, or erased by the proliferation and repetition of the biennial style? To what extent has biennial style been influenced by the art market, trading in cultural stereotypes which ignore the complexity of multiple

identities?

Through his research on biennials in Asia, John Clark offers a typology of biennials based upon location and reach, classifying them as either local, national, international, or transnational (Clark 2010). Within this last category, Clark describes a kind of “quasi-biennial” – a term he uses for the kind of survey exhibitions regarding cultural identity which are shown abroad. In his words, these are “exhibitions of ‘nationally’ selected art shown overseas as a representative selection from current practice” (Clark 2010, 167). This term can be useful in offering a different way of naming a kind of transnational identity survey exhibitions, to emphasize their use of the biennial format as a kind of language based upon characteristics like repetition, short duration and corporate funding. However, these categories also fall short of getting at the underlying history of the politics of the large exhibition or biennial. Clark describes some biennials as hegemonic (like Documenta, or the Venice Biennale, for example), because they are controlled by “a select group of curators whose opinions and subsequent selections have canon-making effects.” (Clark 2010, 167). These, in turn inspire a kind of resistance biennial that counters the dominant hegemonic narratives.

While these are useful starting points for thinking about the theoretical work behind a biennial, it is very difficult to categorise biennials as they are in constant flux, as Caitlin Lennon has demonstrated in her account of the political shifting of the Havana Biennale from extreme leftist to just left of centre over a period of twenty-some years. Just after the turn of the century, two landmark biennials – Documenta 11 (2002) and the 50th edition of the Venice Biennale (2003) – made waves by changing their Euro-centric discourse and practices to become more like the third Havana Biennale in world-wide scope and theme. Documenta 11, nicknamed the post-colonial Documenta, mimicked the kind of self-congratulatory verbiage evident in the promotional text from Magiciens de la Terre. Citing the catalogue and ensuing press, American Studies scholar Chin Tao Wu questioned the claims of the exhibition, nonetheless drawing attention to its radical re-defining of itself as a different kind of biennial than previous editions:

Whatever questions may be raised by the hybrid make-up of the emigrant artists in question, there is something highly incongruous in talking about an exhibition like documenta 11, in which nearly seventy-eight percent of the artists featured were living in North America or Europe, as illustrating ‘the full emergence of the margin’. (Wu 2009, 5)¹⁵⁰

In a parallel move, the 50th Venice Biennale, titled “Dreams and conflicts: the dictatorship of the viewer,” was divided into ten exhibitions with curators from around the world, including Fault Lines: Contemporary African Art and Shifting Landscapes curated by Gilane Tawardos, Z.O.U. – Zone of Urgency curated by Hou Hanru, The Structure of Survival curated by Carlos Basualdo, Contemporary Arab Representations curated by Catherine David, The Everyday Altered curated by Gabriel Orozco and Utopia Station curated by Molly Nesbit, Hans Ulrich Obrist and Rirkrit Tiravanija. (Biennale di Venezia 2003). These two examples demonstrate how a hegemonic kind of biennial like that of Venice has changed drastically to become more like a resistance biennial like Havana, while Havana has shifted to become more of a canon-like biennial within Latin America.

Charting the movement of these artworks between two worlds, Oriana Baddeley recognises the rhythm of the biennial-form in its globalized nature, which draws artworks from the peripheries of the art world, moving them between visibility and invisibility, a rotation from shadow to spotlight (Baddeley 2007, 68-82).¹⁵¹

¹⁵⁰ Wu questioned the validity of such claims: “Figures like this lead us to question claims that the 2002 documenta 11 represented ‘the full emergence of the margin at the centre’, or ‘the most radically conceived event in the history of postcolonial art practice’, offering ‘an unprecedented presence of artists from outside Europe and North America’” (ibid)

¹⁵¹ She writes: “Because a biennial’s physical location does not necessarily indicate its location on the political scale of world politics, it may be more useful to identify a few influential characteristics of the biennial rather than reproduce a typology. For artworks and artists of many large Southern cities, the biennial represents an entry point into an institutionalised world, the so-called Art-Institution.¹⁵¹ It is a marker of visibility, often the first point where art from the South begins to be put into orbit with catalysts and labels, and begins to transit in new constellations. To begin decoding the impact of biennial styling on the global South, it must be first understood as the kind of machineries of representation Stuart Hall described as designed to actively structure, consolidate and maintain identities to serve at the pleasure of the dominant hegemony (Hall 1989, 27-8). Consider the impact on art from the South, if the biennial system is both the primary encounter with the art institution and its territorial mappings. In “The Relocation of Authenticity and Transnational Dilemmas” (2007) Oriana Baddeley writes that artworks from the

To continue along this line of analysis of the alchemy of invisible to visible, and begin to conceptualise the vast knowledge that surrounds the works Baddeley speaks of, as these works circulate between the known, the unknown, and the fog that is the in between, it is useful to understand them as readable objects, texts coded with meaning. Applying Black Studies Scholar Kevin Young's idea of the shadow book, artworks from the so-called peripheries (as well as other texts on the histories they represent) can be theorised as texts that circulate between shadow and spotlight. The shadow book is "situated on the cusp of fiction and history" (Young 2012, 138); it is a text (or other coded object), "a book we don't have, but know of, a book that may haunt the very book we have in our hands." (Young 2012, 138). Young offers a taxonomy of these kinds of shadow books, a concept which goes beyond the literal translation of an actual book – for Young cites examples of the shadow book which range from novels to genres of music (blues, jazz, hip hop), and also poetry and paintings. He tells us that there are three kinds of shadow books: the unwritten (a form of reconstruction), the removed (a form of resistance) and the lost (a disallowed, vanished ghost limb).¹⁵²

peripheries have become "recognised items on the exhibition circuit, existing for their moment in the international spotlight before sinking back into the shadows of their own geographies." (2007, 68-82)

¹⁵² The **unwritten** book is one that "fails to be written... there's a suspicion that this book... is a real result of a psychological block... this unwritten shadow book haunts not just the reader – what could have been – it haunts every writer each time she or he sits down to write." As examples, Young offers the *Africana* encyclopedia by W.E.B. Du Bois, the second novel of Ralph Ellison that never appeared, the musical genre of blues for its "recognizing of and reckoning with existence, however tragic, even (or especially in its failings)". The **removed** book is "the book that's a shadow of the one we do have... the threat of the removed book is the secret book found just behind all the others, its meaning never to be fully revealed... there's always something missing, the removed book suggests – with the distinct and hopeful possibility that there's always something more. The removed shadow book doesn't so much represent loss as it recognizes it." As examples Young describes: a book referenced within a book, the suggestion in poetry titles like Amiri Baraka's Preface to a Twenty Volume Suicide Note, the absences suggested by gaps in numbering in Elizabeth Alexander's "Ars Poetica" series, Jean Michel Basquiat's crossing out of words in his paintings "so you saw them more," the musical genre of jazz because it "represents a willingness to recognize the unfinished, process-based quality of life and art, even taking pleasure in the incompleteness of being." The **lost** book was once "written and now gone.... The book that blackness writes everyday... ghost limbs, books that could be and have been, but aren't anymore. The book that memory, time, accident, and the more active forms of oppression prevent from being read. Young's examples include: the recording sound of Buddy Bolden's horn, the first jazz in New Orleans, the accidentally burned writings of Fenton Johnson, the purposefully burned writings of Lucille Clifton's mother, oral histories which were never written down, "lost because the oral book of black culture is at times not passed down, at others simply passed over." (p. 137-302)

Young is speaking very specifically of Black history in the USA, a diaspora history, but the concept is universal in the examples of colonised and diasporic communities and the way they resist, survive and subvert the hegemonies that operate against them in daily life.¹⁵³ The libraries of Aztec books burned by the Spanish invaders comes to mind as an example of lost shadow books as well as the missing installation records for the Third Havana Biennial, which might have produced another narrative instead of the “subsequent impossibility of re-creating an exact sequence of artworks,” which Whitelegg points out (Whitelegg 2012, 372).

Indeed, the theme of introducing new interventions which upset the logic of known archives has been an important thread in contemporary art and other disciplines of the 21st century (in the fields of history, Black studies, gender studies, to name a few of many). Artists like Jonathas Andrade presented artworks that reorganised old archives and invented histories that could have been part of old histories.¹⁵⁴ Taraneh Hemami invited Iranian and Iranian-American artists to make new artworks inspired by an archive of posters and other documents from 1960-1982 relating to the Iranian Students Association of Northern California, followed by producing the action of the archive and artworks’ incorporation into the Library of Congress and Stanford Library.¹⁵⁵ Historian Martha Few’s *Women Who Lead Evil Lives: Gender, Religion, and the Politics of Power in Colonial Guatemala* (2002) made visible representations of 19th century Central American women through a careful reading of ecclesiastical court records.

¹⁵³ This might be similar to Miguel A. Lopez’s use of Deleuze and Guattari’s term ‘minor literature’ to discuss Latin American conceptual art as it relates to the larger nomenclature of conceptual art from the centre.

¹⁵⁴ For more information see “Jonathas de Andrade” at <http://www.macm.org/en/expositions/jonathas-de-andrade-2/>

¹⁵⁵ For more info, see: “Theory of Survival - Taraneh Hemami in Residence at The LAB,” Arts organisation, The Lab, accessed October 31, 2014, <http://www.thelab.org/schedule/events/181-theory-of-survival.html>.

A Few Common Characteristics:

The Visual Language of the 21st Century Art Biennial

To understand the function of biennials in the so-called peripheries, there are four points worth considering while bearing in mind the transit between darkness and light as the processes in which these elements are at work. In examining the Biennial Reader (Basualdo et al 2010), a seminal anthology of Biennial Studies in the 21st century. These four significant functions describe the profile of the biennial as a system with its own symbolic language and forms of speech:

- Like the *rosca*¹⁵⁶ or *ka'ake*¹⁵⁷, the biennial form is defined by its circular, repetitions cycle or rhythm. Of **short term duration**, it's circuit repeats, multiplies, and circulates a limited number of artworks, artists, and curators. If artworks from outside the centre appear in the biennial circuit intermittently, moving between spotlight and shadow as described by Baddeley, there is an inconsistent rhythm contrasted by the predictable constants of the canon artworks, countries and legacies.
- The protagonists are the celebrities of the art world: **art stars (networked into generations)**, **star curators**, **new urban districts**, and the **new canons of contemporary artworks** established by their repetition and popularity within the circuit. Documented in **massive catalogues** comprised of texts and images by the famous protagonists, these attempt to lay claim to some counter-revolutionary aspect of the exhibition.
- The biennial is a **conduit** connecting its protagonists with larger globalization market processes and inserting them into a system of global hierarchies and power. It implies value, assigning wealth to contemporary art through signifiers like the **white cube** and **object as a territorial index**.
- The biennial-form commodifies the **social**, with both its functioning and presence in the urban world and prioritising of participatory or socially engaged art (also known as relational aesthetics)

¹⁵⁶ A traditional bread enjoyed in countries across Latin America in the shape of a ring, with elements (candied decorations, hidden icons or figurines) which repeat in a pattern along the ring. Sometimes eaten ritually on holy days or celebrations.

¹⁵⁷ A traditional round bread from Syria with a repeated raised pattern in the dough which circles around the ringed shape. Also a synonym for 'rosca'.



Image 3a and 3b. Rosca de los Reyes Magos photo courtesy of Don Paco López Panaderia, a Mexican bakery in Sunset Park, Brooklyn, USA (2014). .Ka'ak, photo courtesy of Mansoura Pastries, a Syrian Egyptian bakery in Gravesend, Brooklyn, USA (2014).

An important element of these four components is their way of functioning as a whole system, sometimes formalised and at other times still in flux. As they transit through the rosca, the components of artist, artwork, curator undergo commodification processes signified by their encasing in the symbolic white cube, as they enter into a space of market value and re-inventions of territory.

In Federico Gamboa's 1908 novel about life just before the revolution,¹⁵⁸ Hipólito, the blind piano player in a big city brothel of the Mexican capital, theorises with the protagonist, Santa, about the "institution." Santa, a 19 year old country girl who's turned to prostitution after being shunned by her family and a jilted love affair, listens (along with the reader) to Hipólito's account of the institution of vice, which he compares to state institutions of the hospital and prison. He warns her that even if she tries to leave the institution of the brothel, it might be difficult (or even impossible) once she has become a part of its circuit.

"It's just that the brothel is like whiskey and like prison and like the hospital;" says the enamoured Hipólito to Santita, "the work is in trying them for the first time, because after tasted, there is no erasing the fanaticism they inspire in their devotees, nor the attraction

¹⁵⁸ During the time of the Porfiriato, an almost thirty-year period under the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz, just before the Mexican Revolution of 1910.

they exert over the faithful.”¹⁵⁹ Inscribed in the relationship between the participant and system, is a necessary reciprocity; they both recreate each other as they reinforce one another’s existence. Most systems that function as institution operate as structures with a certain amount of control, of punishment, of ailments and the afflicted, of seduction, and profit. The allure of the extreme wealth of the biennial system and the promise of fame for its participants is a force which illicit a range of responses (as seen in the range of positioning from the Ghetto Biennale to Documenta), and exerts different kinds of control on both the systems and individuals which come into contact with it. In this section I ask, what effect the biennial system has on the constant production of two key genres in the inventing of the global art of the 21st century: contemporary art from Latin America and from the Arab world. I am referring to a kind of South-South comparison here that is not based upon analysis of national policy, trade or economic analysis which is most commonly connected to the term South-South (as in the United Nation’s South-South corporation, or the post cold war South-South relations in a “new international geopolitics” (Aguilar 214). Rather, I am proposing a dialogue around the socio-cultural issues and concerns raised by both artworks and exhibitions that have come to represent these two large, pan-ethnic regions of the world.

What do these four ideas mean, not only in a general way for art, artists and art scenes of the global South, but what is their specific significance to the story of art from Latin America and the Arab world in the 21st century? Firstly, they helped give rise to a new canon of superstars in the art world, who emerged in generations. Part of this story is revealed in the geographical statistics of the late 20th century and 21st century editions of documenta often referred to as “one of the biggest and most important exhibitions of the past several decades.” (Madzosi 2013, 46).

¹⁵⁹ This is a translation by the author. The original, in Spanish, can be found on the first page of this chapter.

Documenta gazes South

In the four editions of documenta between 1997 and 2012, the presence of artists from the art scenes of Beirut, Cairo, Mexico City and San Salvador fluctuated greatly, most strikingly from 0 in 2007 to 15 in 2012. No artists from El Salvador were featured in documenta during this time, nor have they ever been included – a fact perhaps marking the marginality of El Salvador not only within the global art world but also within its region of the Americas. Of the eighteen artists from either Beirut, Mexico City and Cairo who participated in documenta during these fifteen years two main groups emerged: who were (1) either from the diaspora or (2) belonging to a local generation of artists born roughly within a few years of each other, who share a certain set of demographics and who interacted with each other in ways that informed their practices and styles. These came to be known as kind of schools, some underground, some conceptual, and some actual groups of artists who studied together literally at the same school. Usually they are comprised of several different generations that in turn interacted with each other – the Beirut school, for example. Starting with 1997, documenta 10 featured one artist from these cities, Gabriel Orozco, who belongs to a generation of Mexico City artists which includes Francis Alÿs, the first to make an international name for contemporary art from their city and country, and who built the foundations of their careers with practices informed by their local context. He entered documenta 10, with *Black Kites*, a human skull covered in a black and white checkerboard drawing.

Gabriel Orozco



Born 1962 in Veracruz, Mexico.
Lives in New York and Mexico-City.

Details



At the Museum Fridericianum:

Black Kites, 1997

Image 3c. Gabriel Orozco's Black Kites in documenta 10, photo from Universes in Universe website (1997).

The exhibition text located this work in European aesthetic traditions both modern and traditional.¹⁶⁰ The 1997 documenta Curator, Catherine David, situated Orozco's work featuring an intervention into a human skull between the "modern ruins" of the European city of Kassel (where the exhibition is always held) and what critics called "interesting moments in socially engaged artistic practice" (Goldsworthy 2014).¹⁶¹ The following edition, documenta 11, featured Orozco again with Cazuelas (Beginnings) (2002), a piece about "articulations of receptacles and spaces for transportation, preservation, and survival" (Marian Goodman Gallery, 2002), along with the Atlas Group, the fictitious collective designed by Walid Raad.

¹⁶⁰ "On the one hand, it satisfies the abstract aesthetic aspirations of a modern Western concept, on the other it transports ritual and cult features that link it with traditions cherished even in Europe, especially in Catholic countries: bleaching the skeletons of the dead, decorating them, and then putting them on display in specially erected charnel houses." (Prinz 1997)

¹⁶¹ It was the first time a woman had curated the event, and though many expected her to include a lot of art she had been known to curate from outside the West, this was not the case (Universes in Universe, 1997).

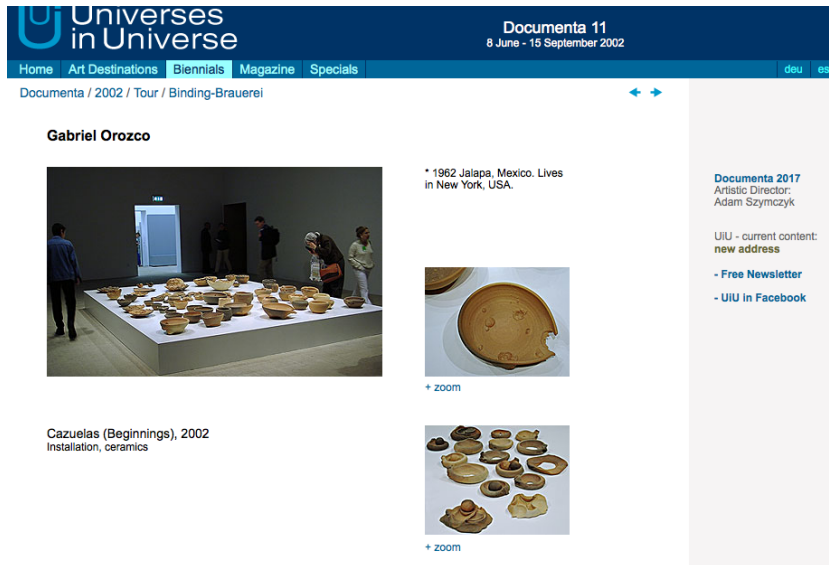
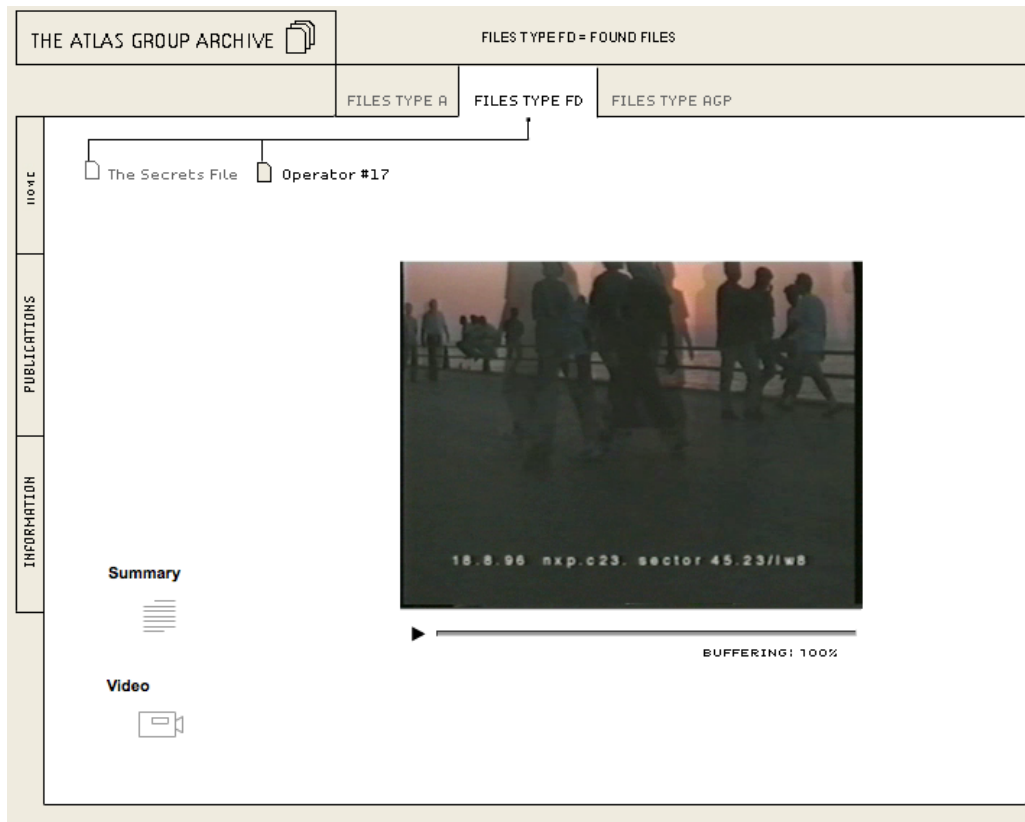


Image 3d. Gabriel Orozco's Cazuelas (Beginnings) in documenta 11, from Universes in Universe website (2002).

Raad would soon become the most renowned member of the Beirut school of contemporary art. Both artists would show work in documenta more than once, the first of their generations to exhibit solo in art centre institutions and represent their countries at Venice Biennales in the same decade. For many audiences, their work served as the first introduction to contemporary Mexican art and contemporary Arab art on an international level. This is important as both were included in this edition of documenta, considered a landmark exhibition and often dubbed as the 'post colonial' or 'multicultural' documenta, curated by Okwui Enwezor, the first non-European, first black person and first person from the South to be a documenta art director. With specific characteristics like an emphasis on the documentary, more than 600 hours of video footage on display, a team of international curator superstars with roots in several continents and 4 pre-exhibition meetings in diverse areas of the globe, the "overall thrust of Enwezor's initiative was to redress the past exclusions carried out by 'Westernism'." (Mercer 2002).



Images 3e-3j. Three works from Walid Raad's Atlas Group in documenta 11 from the online Atlas Group Archives (theatlasgroup.org) (2002). 3e: a page from Notebook 38 *Already Been in a Lake of Fire* Notebook Volume 38; 3f: a page from Notebook 72, *Missing Lebanese wars* Notebook Volume 72. 3g and 3h: film stills from *Operator #17*, *I only wish that I could weep*. 3i and 3j: Film stills from *Hostage: The Bachar Tapes (English Version)*.

In 2007, documenta 12 featured no artists from Egypt, Lebanon, Mexico, or San Salvador, although artists from other areas of Latin America and the Middle East were included. In her study of documenta editions between 1997 and 2007, Chin-Tao Wu concludes that while overall representation from artists outside Western Europe rose during this decade, the biennial in general and documenta in particular were still functioning as “popular institutional mechanisms” of the West.¹⁶² Supporting Wu's hypothesis, one of the main constants of documenta, at least from 1997 through 2012, was representation of artists from the art world's centres like the USA, France, England,

¹⁶² “The biennial, the most popular institutional mechanism of the last two decades for the organisation of large-scale international art exhibitions, has, despite its decolonising and democratic claims, proved still to embody the traditional power structures of the contemporary Western art world; the only difference being that ‘Western’ has quietly been replaced by a new buzzword, ‘global’”. (Wu 2008)

and obviously, Germany, the host country of this particular biennial. The difference in representation between the global North and global South at documenta is striking, especially as a show which has repeatedly declared itself on the website, in press, publications and exhibition text as, “an authoritative worldwide seismograph of contemporary art”. (ibid)

A drastic change occurred between the 2007 and the 2012 edition of documenta, themed by artistic director Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev as “Collapse and Recovery”. This time, three artists from the same generation in Cairo were featured, along with an older artist from the Egyptian diaspora; three Lebanese artists from the same Beirut school of contemporary art were included as well as two artists from the Lebanese diaspora; and six artists from two close generations in Mexico City were included. As a whole, the work of these 15 artists shared some common themes: social engagement, a concern for public work, new genres art and the indexical object. The following paragraphs place the artworks and artistic practices within their local, generational context, a kind of grouping that has been controversial at times. Some artists, like Alÿs, emphasise publically how belonging to a generation of artists inspire their practice. Others find it a limiting way of understanding artistic practice, especially when it leads to the expectation of a certain aesthetic or a certain sensibility, as critics like to say. But could the city, or generation, really make the artist – as much as the artist makes the city (or generation)? In these histories I would like to call particular attention to what happens to these practices, histories and narratives as they engage with – and sometime inevitably become part of – the institution of the biennial system.

Mexico City Generations

Gabriel Orozco (1962) and Francis Alÿs (1959) belong to the first generation of internationally known contemporary Mexican artists, a new wave of conceptual art. They have been compared to the 1920s Modernist movement in Mexico (Oles 2013) and to the

Young British Artists (yBas)¹⁶³ of the 1990s, perhaps to the latter because of their proximity in age. Or maybe it's because of a use of similar "shock tactics" tropes, or because there is some eclipsing between the two scenes, most famously with the appearance of "the original young British artist" (Tuckman 2005). Damien Hirst in Mexico, when he moved there in the mid 2000s and began showing locally declaring a "deep affinity" (Tuckman 2005).¹⁶⁴ with the Mexican cultural attitude towards death. Whatever the reason, both generations of artists went through similar experiences on their way to mega stardom, playing similar roles in the art scenes of their city: they met in university art programmes, they created local artist-run spaces and exhibitions, they had a role in revitalising the gallery scene, in some cases in galleries they themselves started. Many in each group were educated in Europe, as well. But are these aspects of two histories unique to these two groups, or just general characteristics of many artist generations from a range of eras and cities?

In some ways, Alÿs and Orozco represent opposite trajectories. While Alÿs migrated from Belgium to Mexico in the 1980s as an architect, later deciding to become a visual artist while in Mexico, Orozco left Mexico after graduating from ENAP¹⁶⁵ to study in Madrid, where he encountered vulnerability in the immigrant experience that was foundational to his practice:

What's important is to be confronted deeply with another culture. And also to feel that I am the Other not the resident. That I am the immigrant. I was displaced and in a country where the relationship with Latin America is conflicted. (Morgan 2011, 9)¹⁶⁶

¹⁶³ The generation known as the young British artists. For more on this see: Corris, Michael. "British? Young? Invisible? w/Attitude?," *ArtForum*, May 1992, 109; Simon Ford, "Myth Making: The Young British Artist," March 1996.; Bush, Kate. "Young British art: the YBA sensation", , June 2004, 91; and Wu, Chin-tao. "YBA Saatchi? –from Shark Sensation to Pastoral Painting." *Contemporary painting in context* (2009): 197-216.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid. In the same article, Hirst is quoted as saying, "I think that the way that I deal with death is a bit Mexican. In England people hide or shy away from death and ideas about it, whereas Mexicans seem to walk hand in hand with it...In that way I feel a bit liberated here."

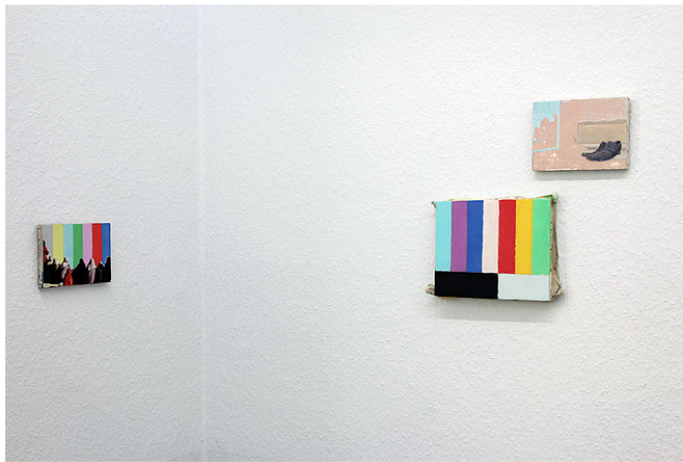
¹⁶⁵ Escuela Nacional de Artes Plásticas, one of the premier art programmes at a public university, where other artists of this generation studied, like Teresa Margolles, who founded SeMeFo while studying there with her peers.

¹⁶⁶ Orozco continues, "I came from a background that was very progressive. And then to travel to Spain and confront a very conservative society that also wanted to be very avant-garde in the 1980s, but treated me as

Orozco made his home in Northern cities and has for many years, lived between New York, Europe and Mexico City, all places which continue to inform his work. His work exhibited internationally and in documenta has often been said to reflect this collection of experiences and histories. Alÿs's artistic practice also takes place in different sites around the world, but more often in sites of the global South, calling attention to political differences between South and North. For documenta 12, his commissioned piece, *Reel Unreel* (2011) featured children in Kabul playing in the city streets, with reels of film provided by the artist and his collaborators.

Obere Karlsstr. 4: Francis Alÿs

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© Photo: Haupt & Binder

documenta (13), Fast Tour
A first tour through the
documenta (13), 9 June - 16
Sept. 2012 in Kassel, Germany.
Some works at different
venues.

Francis Alÿs
* 1959 Antwerp, Belgium. Lives
in Mexico City, Mexico.
[more info & photos](#)

See also:



Extensive Photo Tour
Documenta 13 - A selection of
art works at most of the
venues: Photos & information.

an immigrant, was shocking. That feeling of vulnerability was really important for developing my work. I think a lot of my work has to do with that kind of exposure, to expose vulnerability and make that your strength.” (ibid)



Images 3k and 3l. Francis Alÿs's paintings in documenta 13, photo from Universes in Universe website (2012) and video still from documenta online archives, of Alÿs's film *Reel-Unreel*, Kabul, Afghanistan, in collaboration with Julien Devaux and Ajmal Maiwandi, commissioned by documenta 13 (2011).

Orozco became known first, showing before many in his generation and by himself (outside of the generational lens) as a kind of lone pioneer (although later he curated group shows of the next generation of Mexican artists whom he knew from the local scene, some of whom, like Abraham Cruzvillegas and Damián Ortega, he also taught and is seen to be an influence on their work (Orozco 2009). Addressing similar themes and medium as his mentor, Cruzvillegas appeared in documenta 13 with a public project he titled *Untitled Non-productive Activities*, an experimental kind of sculpture which he based on a game of pick-up sticks and carried out spontaneously during and before the exhibition, for which he “recruited people, objects, and his own body to form social sculptures (picnics, walks, or games in the street)” (Soto 2012) and documented by asking passersby to record the activities on their mobile phones.

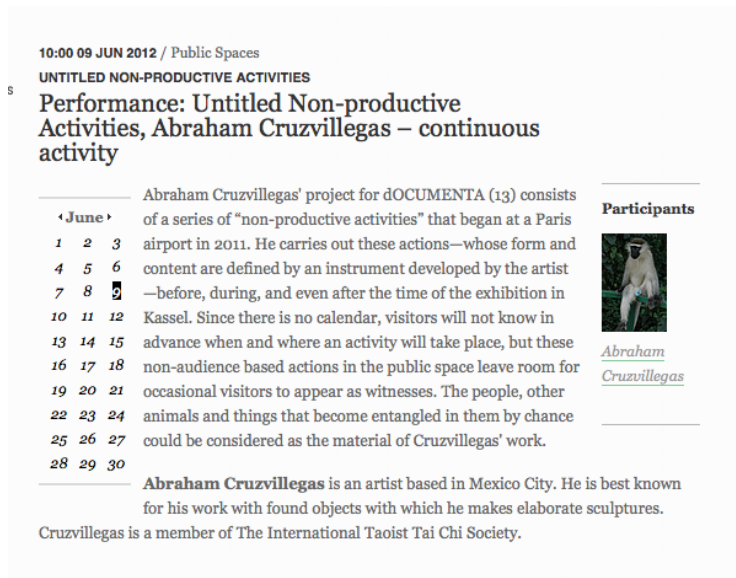


Image 3m. Detail describing Abraham Cruzvillegas' public project for documenta 13 Untitled Non-productive Activities (2012)

In 1987, after returning to Mexico City from Madrid, Orozco organised the weekly meetings that would become known as Taller de los Viernes with Cruzvillegas and other artists of the newer generation, including Damián Ortega Gabriel Kuri, and Dr. Lakra (Jerónimo López Ramírez) during which they met in Orozco's house to discuss the international art scene and books Orozco brought back to Mexico from his travels around the world (Orozco and Ortega 2012). It was a foundational space where many new art and culture projects were developed, and Orozco has called it "a pedagogical activity that substituted for the traditional training at a Mexican art academy" (ibid). For Orozco, it was also a way to re-engage with Mexico and the Mexican art scene after he felt his work in Europe had developed into something that was then "strange" in Mexico (ibid).

Many groups popped up within this generation, although not all were related or even amiable. Orozco formed this group at the request of the younger generation of Ortega, Cruzvillegas, and Kuri (who would later go on to co-found the iconic gallery of Mexico City 1990s scene, Kurimanzutto, with Mónica Manzutto). But he also received criticism from other artists in his generation, for his role participating in the institutionalisation, biennialisation and subsequent definition of Mexico contemporary art and artists through

the lens of Eurocentrism. Miguel Ventura's engagement with Orozco's work in his controversial piece, *Cantos Cívicos: Un proyecto de NILC en colaboración con Miguel Ventura* (2008) -- made waves in the Mexico City art scene, offending patrons and curators who played major roles in the city's art infrastructure of the 21st century.



Image 3n. Photograph documenting Miguel Ventura's *Cantos Cívicos* (2008) at the MUAC, depicting parts of the installation that created a visual dialogue with the work and figure of Gabriel Orozco. From the *Cantos Cívicos* blog: <http://nilc.lcda.org/>

Art critic and curator Lourdes Morales describes the controversy over Ventura's installation:

For at least ten years, the Puerto Rican-Mexican-American artist Miguel Ventura has been interested in creating a fictitious oppressive institution that ironizes the political and economical neoliberal domination in an international context. Ventura developed a psychotic half-person, half-corporation called ~~NILC~~ (New Interterritorial Language Committee). (Morales 2013)¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁷ Morales continues: "Ventura created this exhibition after more than thirty years of living in Mexico. For him, this was a final response to the dominance of the cultural elite expressed through colonial practices. According to him, the MUAC had been facing "politics of ideological purification"; but as he has said: "...this is also a form of a society that can not afford to face its problems of colonialism, racism, tradition

The remaining four Mexican artists who were featured in documenta 13 belong to a generation that followed Cruzvillegas and Ortega by a few years. Pedro Reyes (1972), Mario Garcia Torres (1975), Adriana Lara (1978), and Julieta Aranda (1975), all presented work with some link to social practice. Reyes, Garcia Torres and Aranda had already shown work together, along with Cruzvillegas, Ortega, Kuri, and others in generational exhibitions like *Escultura Social: A New Generation of Art from Mexico City* (2007). Perhaps the clearest instance of social practice was Pedro Reyes's *Sanatorium*, a “transient clinic which provides short, unexpected therapies” to exhibition visitors, treating them with a mash-up of therapy as art, mostly aimed at addressing the ailments and illnesses resulting from life in urban centres (Reyes 2011).

Documenta / 2012 / Fast Photo Tour

Karlsruhe: Pedro Reyes

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© Photo: Haupt & Binder

dOCUMENTA (13), Fast Tour
A first tour through the dOCUMENTA (13), 9 June - 16 Sept. 2012 in Kassel, Germany. Some works at different venues.

Pedro Reyes
* 1972 Mexico City, Mexico;
lives there.
[more info & photos](#)

See also:



Extensive Photo Tour
Documenta 13 - A selection of art works at most of the venues. Photos & information.

Image 3o. Pedro Reyes' *Sanatorium* at documenta 13, image from Universes in Universe website (2012).

Julieta Aranda contributed with a participatory artwork as well, also featured in its own hut on one of the exhibition gardens, like Reyes's *Sanatorium*. Representing the

and hypocrisy. There is an apartheid state in this country.”¹⁶⁷[20] That was the way he illustrated his critique in *Cantos Cívicos*.

The first thing that the MUAC was confronted with in a studio visit at the beginning of 2008, was a photo by Annie Leibovitz that Ventura took from a *Vanity Fair* magazine, showing Gabriel Orozco, Chuck Close, Cindy Sherman, Patricia Phelps Cisneros, among others. The picture was modified, making a parody of Orozco's *Atomist* (1996), and was also juxtaposed with Nazi and dollar symbols. The curators of the institution did not like this, and it caused a falling out with the artist during the following months.” (ibid)

publishing platform e-flux (which includes e-flux journal), which she founded with Anton Vickle. Aranda co-conceived of the event in two parts, with a participatory art installation in Kassel titled Time/Bank and an event in Moscow titled Time/Food, an event featuring a new film. Time/bank was based on the time banking concept “as a tool by which a group of people can create an alternative economic model where they exchange their time and skills, rather than acquire goods and services through the use of money or any other state-backed value”¹⁶⁸; visitors to the space took place in “a series of exchanges which could be read/experienced/seen.” (Mendoza 2012)

Time/Bank (e-flux: Julieta Aranda & Anton Vidokle)

← 7 of 37 →



dOCUMENTA (13), 2012
9 June - 16 Sept. 2012 in Kassel, Germany. Artistic director: Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev. Photo tour: Works at the Karlssau park.

Julieta Aranda
* 1975 Mexico City, Mexico. Lives in Berlin, Germany, and New York, USA.
[more info & photos](#)

Anton Vidokle
* 1965 Moscow, Russia. Lives in Berlin, and New York.
[more info & photos](#)

© Photo: Haupt & Binder

Image 3p. e-flux (Julieta Aranda and Anton Vidokle) installation Time/Bank commissioned for documenta 13 (2012), photo from Universes in Universe website.

Mario Garcia Torres used his invitation to documenta 13 to re-introduce the work of Italian artist Alighiero Boetti, an artist who participated in documenta 5, with a series of work around Boetti pieces that were almost (but not) shown in the 5th edition.

¹⁶⁸ Definition from e-flux website: e-flux.com/timebank/



Documenta 13, 2012
9 June - 16 Sept. 2012 in
Kassel, Germany. Artistic
director: Carolyn Christov-
Bakargiev. Photo tour: Works at
the Fridericianum.

Mario García Torres
* 1975 Mondoiva, Mexico. Lives
in Mexico City, Mexico.
more info & photos

The project is about the search of Mario García
Torres for the One Hotel that the Italian artist
Alighiero Boetti ran in Kabul between 1971 and
1977.



Image 3q and 3r. Mario García Torres' Exhibition text for Daniel Buren at the Georges Pompidou Centre in *Magiciens de la Terre* (1989). <<Mappa>> (1971) by Alighiero Boetti, brought to documenta 13 by Mario García Torres (2012), photo by Niche Berlin for www.stilnberlin.de blog .

Inserting a work from the past back into the exhibition some 40 years later, Garcia Torres comments on the extreme changes of the political map and world view since Harald Szeemann's iconic documenta 5 in 1972.¹⁶⁹ This kind of tribute piece, in which an artist researches and represents or re-inserts the work of another artist from another time, was becoming increasingly popular, as a way to speak about absence and presence, the hidden and the revealed.

¹⁶⁹ Definition from e-flux website: e-flux.com/timebank/

Adriana Lara, who's artistic practice Art in America calls "strikingly fluent in the formalist language of sculpture and painting currently at that market's heart" (Guthrie 2013), participated in documenta 13 with *Purposely with Purpose*, 2012, a mixed media installation and accompanying video that dealt with a piece about the artists own position "situated in a digital age of cut and paste" (Image 3q).



Image 3s. Adriana Lara's *Unpurposely with Purpose* (2012) commissioned for documenta 13, photo of mixed media installation and video from artnews.org.

The work drew attention to the both the construction of identity and construction of curatorial narrative as co-conspirators, with the creation of a cartoonish aesthetic into which the face of 1930s Mexican film starlet Lupe Velez is inserted into the grid-like

world of photoshop, where “the grid is an endless surface upon which we see but an excerpt, a cut, waiting for our own projection.” (Basta 2013)¹⁷⁰

In her 2014 essay on independent spaces in 1990s Mexico, Sol Henaro demonstrates that these three generations of artists interacted not only with each other in commonly cited places like la Panaderia, Temístocles 44, and galleries like Kurimanzutto, but also in a variety of less-cited platforms, most of which were initiated by artists from these same generations, like SOMA, Poliéster, Art Deposit, Pinto Mi Raya, Curaré, La Agencia, La Celda Contemporánea, Velocidad Crítica, and the 1989-1997 magazine, La PUS moderna, which she describes below:

La PUS moderna fungió como un lugar para la experimentación, para el fortalecimiento de la crítica frontal y el ejercicio del despojo de pudores al hablar, al figurar como dispositivo para la circulación de textos híbridos y producciones artísticas que no encontraban salida fácilmente en los canales de distribución existentes. (Henaro 2014, 105)¹⁷¹

With this seemingly never ending list of artist spaces and initiatives from this time period, each correlated with generations within generations, it is clear that the artists of this time and place were extremely engaged with the local scene, perhaps even more actively so than their peers in London or other cities. While their purposes and strategies are diverse, perhaps its useful to see them also as operating within a conceptual space framed by local political events of extremes. Ximena Apisdorf Soto offers a summary of

¹⁷⁰ Lara is also part of the collective Perros Negros with Agustina Ferreira and the founder of Gaga Arte Contemporáneo, Fernando Mesta. In her brief overview of the Mexican contemporary art generations since the 1990s, independent curator Ximena Apisdorf Soto places Lara (as well as Mario Garcia Torres and Stefan Bruggemann) as the part of the newest generation of Mexican artists who form part of the “international conceptualism” whose signature is a “critical and radical irreverence” which came and are in “clear contraposition” to the “multiculturalism” of Alys and Orozco’s generation, and the “strong political engagement” of Teresa Margolles and Santiago Sierra (Apisdorf Soto 2013).

¹⁷¹ “The PUS moderna [a colloquial play on the term ‘the post modern’] served as a place for experimentation, for the strengthening of direct criticism and the practice of honing the unabashedly honest voice, as a device for the circulation of hybrid texts and artistic productions that did not find an outlet easily in the existing modes of distribution.” (author’s translation). Henaro lists some of the best known names of this generation as those who published text and graphics in the magazine: “graphic contributions from Damián Ortega and el Dr. Lakra; writings of Olivier Debrouse, Abraham Cruzvillegas, Osvaldo Sánchez, Guillermo Gómez Peña; photographic registries of Pedro Meyer, Teresa Margolles, Adolfo Patiño, Armando Cristeto and the drawings of Carla Rippey, Felipe Ehrenberg, Miguel Ventura, Ambra Polidori, Martha Pacheco, Rubén Ortiz Torres o Estrella Carmona, to mention but a few names of contributors.” (Henaro 2014, 105)

a few contextual themes, which sprung from the local political situation and places the artists discussed in this thesis within a historical political context that informs the art scene:

In the recent history of Mexico, 1994 was a seminal year: on January 1 the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was ratified, and the same year the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZNL) declared its nonviolent and defensive war against the Mexican state and the military, paramilitary and corporate incursions into Chiapas. During this period of political instability the Mexican art scene started a process of change and adaptation. (Apisdorf Soto 2013)¹⁷²

Many scholars – mainly historians, curators and art critics – have worked to expand this list of places, organisations and actions from Mexico City 1990s to present. There have also been a number of artists groups and spaces organised around the concept of art and gender, like Mónica Mayer's Arte Genero workshops and the ensuing groups of feminist collectives which were formed out of the participants in the second modest decade of the 21st century, like *Las Sucias*, *Las Desobedientes*, *Las Disidentes*,¹⁷³ to name a few (these are the few which I had contact with in Mexico City). Another important collective art formation during this period is the art and education labs set up by José Miguel Gonzalez Casanova (Buzo Flores 2013).

Beirut Generation

In many ways, the new generations of Mexican conceptual contemporary artists perhaps has the most in common with the Beirut generation that included Walid Raad, Akram Zaatari, Rabih Mroué and many of their peers. Both generations rose to international

¹⁷² Soto continues, "Over the past two decades since these initial experiments began, art in Mexico has addressed issues like poverty, labour conditions, violence, globalization and war. Miguel Ventura's Civic Songs (2008) presented at MUAC or Teresa Margolles's What else could we talk about? (2009) at the Venice Biennale are just two examples. The dynamism of alternative spaces in the '90s and their institutionalization and consequential inclusion in the major art system have internationalized the Mexican art scene, going beyond the solitary leadership of artist Gabriel Orozco. In 2012, former Tate associate curator of Latin American Art Cuauhtémoc Medina organized the European biennial Manifesta and won the 2012 Walter Hopps Award for Curatorial Achievement, while Margolles was awarded the fifth Artes Mundi prize." (Apisdorf Soto 2013)

fame through the biennial circuit around the same time, two of the first from the global South to make it to the headlines together, who witnessed their artist-initiative spaces become institutions, who experienced the burdens of national representation and crisis on a public level, and who were the focus of both local and international critique, who became icons not only of their generation and city, but stood in for national representations of 21st century issues and regional ones as well, as each played a key role in the defining of Arab contemporary art and Latin American contemporary art.

The work and fame of these two generations placed Beirut and Mexico City on the map as contemporary art centres and destinations, although these new titles were complicated by national security crises, and on and off violence, related to the re-occurring US wars on terror in the Middle East and the US wars on drugs in Latin America. The discrepancies with the way these places were narrated and created in the social imaginary and mass media from outside contrasted drastically with the way artists wanted to narrate from inside. Especially for artists from this generation in Beirut, ideas about the documentary, history, and memory became a prime concern for reconfiguration, as they employed strategies both playfully and earnestly.

Like the first Mexican contemporary generation, the three Lebanese artists who formed part of documenta 13 transitioned from emerging to mid career artists during the time of biennialisation, a process which left its mark on their production, reception, and positioning within several spheres of art worlds. Curator and art historian of the Beirut school of art, Kaelen Wilson-Goldie has described Rabih Mroué, Lina Saneh, Walid Raad, Akram Zaatari, Marwan Rechmaoui and Walid Sadek as sharing a certain sensibility and being “responsible for constructing a contemporary art scene from scratch in the 1990s.” (Wilson-Goldie 2010). In 2009 Wilson-Goldie pointed out that this scene,

despite political unrest and lack of a state-funded arts and culture infrastructure,¹⁷⁴ has developed due in large part to artist initiatives:

Nevertheless, Beirut is home to one of the most active and dynamic contemporary art scenes in the region. The engine of that scene is a self-organising group of artists' collectives and independent, non-profit associations that have, over the past decade, constructed an alternative infrastructure for the making and exhibiting, as well as the documenting and archiving, of contemporary art practices. (Wilson-Goldie 2010)¹⁷⁵

Wilson-Goldie's summary of the scene reflects the common practice of critics and historians of locating the Beirut art scene not just nationally, but within the larger region, for which Walid Raad also became both an icon and indexical figure, standing in for an explanation of contemporary 'Arab' aesthetic which curators (more than artists) tried to imagine into being. This can mean that artworks from Lebanon are used to explain artistic movements and sensibilities from Cairo, Alexandria, Istanbul and Amman. The sensibility which Wilson speaks of might be described as an intimacy with the idea of remembering, in which the trace calls the viewer back to a specific context and experience, and the viewer understands (or remembers) through local knowledge or misunderstands through an imagination of the region built through mass media.

With the trademark use of trace and indexicality, vintage cars stand in for the on-going randomised car bombings which have spanned over years of war and peace time, cell

¹⁷⁴ Which she describes as: "Throughout its history Beirut has suffered episodic bouts of violence and chronic political instability. The structure of the Lebanese state is weak and, given the persistence of internal and external conflicts and a slew of urgent issues (unemployment hovering around 25 per cent, \$43 billion in public debt, the struggle to provide basic services, the resistance and its weapons, population displacements and reconstruction costs due to war), the government tends to place cultural activities rather low on its list of priorities. At present, the city boasts neither a museum of modern art nor an institute for contemporary art. Public funding for the arts is negligible to non-existent. There is a skeletal commercial gallery system but there are too few collectors to constitute a viable local market, particularly for works in media considered difficult, such as photography, video and installation." (Wilson-Goldie 2010)

¹⁷⁵ She continues, "This group includes Ashkal Alwan (The Lebanese Association for Plastic Arts, which organises the Home Works Forum and more recently Video Works), Beirut DC (a film collective that runs Ayam Beirut al-Cinema), a bi-annual festival of independent Arab cinema), the Arab Image Foundation (an organisation for the collection and preservation of the region's photographic heritage that doubles as a creative laboratory for member artists and curators), Né à Beyrouth (which organises an annual festival of Lebanese film) and the 98 Weeks Research Project (a curatorial collective that arranges workshops and symposia), among others." (ibid)

phone video is used to speak about both the violence of indiscriminate death and anti-establishment aesthetics in filmmaking; men's white underwear briefs refer back to the investigations of the body and nudity. But Zaatari says that his work is not about using memory as primary artistic medium. Explaining his work in an interview for the Mexican arts and culture magazine *Código*, says that his work is about history, although often misread as dealing with memory, a common misconception from the 1990s (for more of the interview transcription, see Appendix 1):

--Algunas de tus obras —como The Time Capsule, This Day at Ten y el proyecto The Arab Image Foundation— se enfocan en la memoria. ¿Consideras que esto responde a un cierto grado de nostalgia?, ¿existe en tu discurso un miedo a la pérdida?

--Mi trabajo es crítico con respecto a la memoria como construcción. No obstante, aunque suelo trabajar con documentos del pasado, mi obra no se puede categorizar como un trabajo sobre la memoria. Ése discurso es típico de los noventa y no me siento identificado.¹⁷⁶ (Silva and López 2013)¹⁷⁷

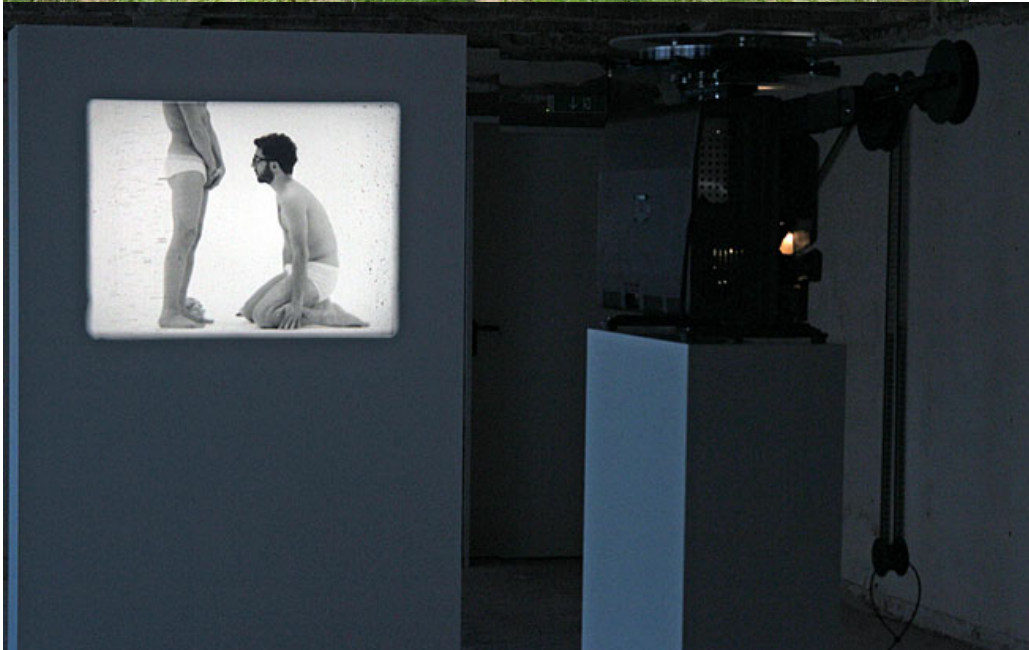
Further exploring his study of photography as registry, Zaatari presented *The Time Capsule*, an installation about preserving the 600,000 plus photographs in the Arab Image Foundation,¹⁷⁸ and a video work, *The End of Time*, for *documenta 13*, in which two male lovers in white underwear flirt and reject each other. The latter dealt with the act of registering the body as related to sexuality and intimacy, “poignantly examines the birth and the disappearance of desire, an endless chain with successive beginnings and endings

¹⁷⁶ “--Some of your works - such as *The Time Capsule*, *This Day at Ten* and *The Arab Image Foundation* - focus on memory. Do you consider that this responds to a certain degree of nostalgia? Is there a fear of loss in your discourse? --My work is critical with regard to memory as construction. However, although I often work with documents from the past, my work cannot be categorized as a work on memory. That discourse is typical of the nineties and I do not identify with that.” (author's translation).

¹⁷⁷ The interview continues, “--Would you say that you use history as a medium? --Absolutely. When you get stuck watching the story you become a policeman who questions the veracity of a text and explores the possibility of a parallel truth. What interests me are the writings of history, very personal ones, with much desire and many prejudices, but written from my own experience. I do not really have any problem correcting other histories. --You work with media related to the recording and preservation of memory, such as photography and video, do you prefer them because of the connotations they carry? --I have a special attachment to photography as a record, I like to think that it has a privileged relationship with history because it captures everything that surrounds us. For me photography is an area of study, I like to observe it, study it, collect it, decode it and read it. I understand it as a scenario, as a gesture on radical conservation.” (author's translation – for original Spanish text see appendix one chapter notes).

¹⁷⁸ In 1997, along with several other artists, Zaatari and Raad co-founded the Arab Image Foundation, to collect and preserve photographs from the Middle East, North Africa and the Arab diaspora.

enacted by three figures... highlight[ing] human connection to preservation: of life, love and desire.” (Velardo 2014).



Images 3t and 3u. Akram Zaatari working on Time Capsule for documenta 13 (2012), photo from Corbis Images, <http://www.corbisimages.com>. Zaatari's End of Time video at documenta 13 (2012), photo from Universes in Universe website.

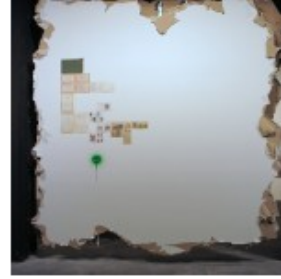
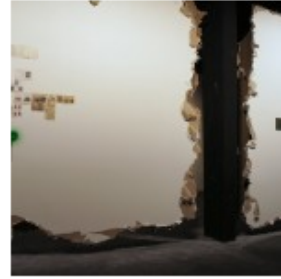
Further explaining the works he presented at documenta 13, which he also showed in similar forms in a solo show at Kurimanzutto Gallery in Mexico,¹⁷⁹ Zaatari compared the video and time capsule to his first solo show in Mexico City as “investigations into the photography of the past” that are stripped bare of a narrative as the capsule was also presented as a discarded object “in a way naked like a skeleton, almost without a narrative.”¹⁸⁰ Much has been written on this use of the lens of memory, not only in examinations of Zaatari’s work but also regarding the work of his peers. But memory is personal, while history is universal. Theorising about “the critical-historical meaning of contemporary art in the transnational spaces of the international artworld”, British academic Peter Osborne has also made this point about Walid Raad’s work being about history and not memory. He criticises what he calls the “memory model” often applied in explaining historic significance in contemporary art, as falling short as it dangerously opens the possibility of awarding memory (in the form of testimony and recollection) the status of “having direct historical roles” thus “turning memory into a form of forgetting” (Osborne cited in Pavillion 2010). Instead of analysing artworks as “artefacts of remembrance”, part of a strategy often used to claim contemporaneity as an artefact of cultural memory, Osborne proposes looking forward rather than backwards to memory or history, and instead understanding contemporary transnational work like Raad’s and Zaatari’s “not as an artifact of memory” but instead as “a constructed history, a staging of

¹⁷⁹ Incidentally, Zaatari is the first so far, of his generation to be represented by a gallery in Mexico City, where he has participated in a solo (2013) and group show with artists from the generations mentioned in the previous section (as well as a major solo show at el MUAC in 2012). For more on this exhibition, Estrella Distant at Kurimanzutto which also included a number of other artists, amongst whom were Carlos Amorales, Miguel Calderón, Abraham Cruzvillegas, Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, Daniel Guzmán, Jonathan Hernández, Alfredo Jaar, Cildo Meireles, Ana Mendieta, Damián Ortega, Raymond Pettibon, Mira Schendel, and Rirkrit Tiravanija, see <http://moussemagazine.it/estrella-distante-at-kurimanzutto-mexico-city/>

¹⁸⁰ In Zaatari’s words: “*The Uneasy Subject en el MuAC era una investigación general mezclada con obras que tratan sobre la representación del cuerpo humano. The End of Time... también se interesa en el cuerpo, pero sobre todo en las representaciones fotográficas del pasado. Últimamente he tenido la oportunidad de trabajar con ideas abstractas sobre la desnudez que pueden verse en esta muestra. The Time Capsule, por ejemplo, es una pieza que parece estar tirada en el suelo, sin construir, de cierta manera está desnuda como un esqueleto, casi sin narrativa.*” (Silva and Lopez 2013). “The Uneasy Subject in the MuAC was a general investigation mixed with works dealing with the representation of the human body. The End of Time ... is also interested in the body, but especially in the photographic representations of the past. Lately I have had the opportunity to work with abstract ideas about nudity that can be seen in this sample. The Time Capsule, for example, is a piece that seems to be lying on the floor, unbuilt, in some ways naked like a skeleton, almost without narrative.” (author’s translation).

the disparity between memory and historical experience thru the subjugation of memory to artistic form” (Osborne 2008).

The change between the kind of work Raad presented in documenta 11 and documenta 13 perhaps parallels this kind of critique of readings and misreadings regarding the elements of memory and history in his work. Documenta 11 featured three works of pseudo-documentary personal testimonies about war and conflict in Lebanon, all of them presented as fragments of a larger archive. Pages torn out from a notebook of Dr. Fakhouri: one covered in a collage of vintage cars with hand-written descriptions in Arabic, notes of numbers and phrases around a yellowed newspaper cut out of a race horse; titled, respectively, *Already Been in a Lake of Fire_Notebook Volume 38*; and a page from *Notebook 72, Missing Lebanese wars_Notebook Volume 72*. The two videos he exhibited showed scenes of silhouettes on Beirut’s seaside promenade known as the Cornish (*Operator #17, I only wish that I could weep*) and another with a man sitting in a nondescript room in a white shirt, talking to the camera in Arabic, or dubbed in English in a woman’s voice (*Hostage: The Bachelor Tapes (2001)*). The man, identified as Souheil Bachar, recounts a personal narrative of being held captive during ten years during the war with five Americans, each of whom published a book about the same experience but with vastly different accounts of the same event, describing the cultural, textual and sexual tensions that arose.



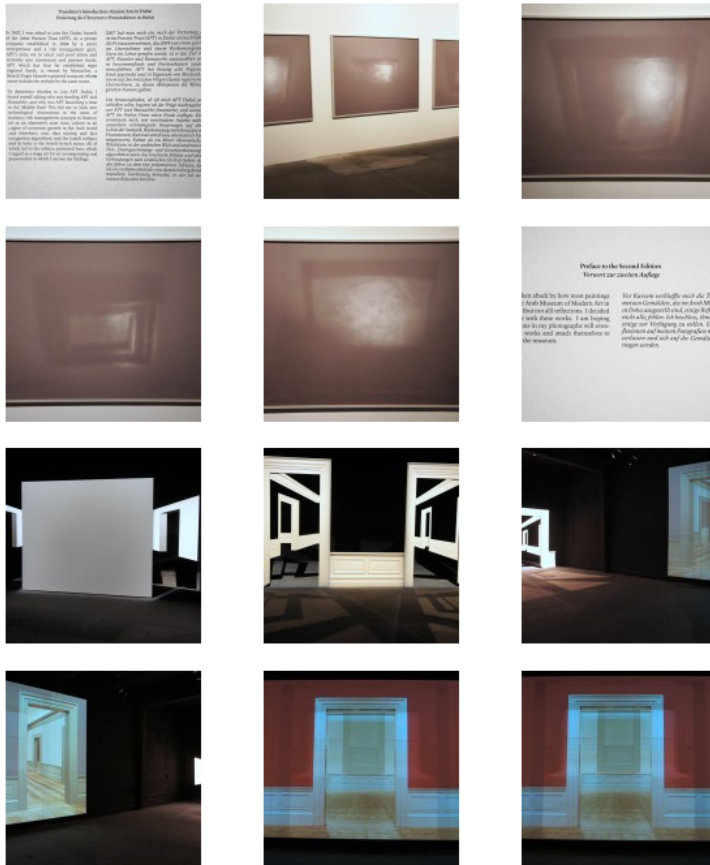


Image 3v and 3w. Images from Walid Raad's installation at documenta 13 (2012), photos from Sfeir-Semler Gallery <http://www.sfeir-semler.com>.

There are several innovative strategies Raad applies here which stand out from the norms of contemporary art practices: 1) he originally presents the fictional group and archives as real (with real images and facts embedded in these fabrications) 2) he emphasises the difference in local and international interpretations, by including a well known Lebanese actor who plays the role of Bechar, recognizable to most Lebanese audiences but not to outsiders 3) he emphasises the incompleteness of each testimony by describing them as the only available parts of a huge archive.

Each testimony is only a small part of a larger whole which the viewer does not have access to, emphasising the idea that we do not know the whole story, with the inclusion of these absences, the kind of removed texts or removed shadow books, to use Young's term. And even though at closer look it is obvious Raad is spinning a narrative

somewhere between truth and invention, viewers and critics often misinterpreted the fictional characters as either real,¹⁸¹ or standing in for real characters, as Osborne has pointed out. In Raad's words:

The people I talked to even doubted that this guy ever existed," he explained, "which became the occasion to imagine his testimony. It is clear that it is not about him, but he became the object on which the Americans hostages displaced and projected their own anxieties about captivity, about forced cohabitation, and about fears of rape from the captors. It was less about him than about them. So I chose to invent him as opposed to finding him. (Menick 2011).¹⁸²

Another work produced by Raad as the Atlas Group, the 2005 volume *The Truth Will be Known When the Last Witness is Dead*, Osborne describes as the staging "the auto-desctruction of the memory model" by taking it to its "ubsurd logical end," which Osborne understands as a reference to Walter Benjamin's notions of truth as the death of intention. "Because art is the death of intention," he concludes, "it can't function as the memory model." After the immense visibility, criticism and intrepretations around Raad's work, he reappeared in documenta 13 with a piece about the invisibilities, shadows and absences in Arab art. To speak about the removed and unseen, he uses a theory of "withrdrawal of a tradition past a surpassing disaster" from Jalal Toufic (1962), a writer and artists from Raad's generation who also participated in documenta 13, with a published text as part of the 100 Notes – 100 Thoughts project (Documenta website 2012). In "Scratching on Things I Could Disavow: A History of Art in the Arab World" Raad describes this project as beginning with a fascination in 2007 with the appearance of a new arts infrastructure (museums, galleries, schools, foundations) in the Arabian Gulf (he lists Abu Dhabi, Beirut, Cairo, Doha, Istanbul, Ramallah and Sharjah), paralleled by the "increased visibility of the makers, sponsors, consumers and histories of

¹⁸¹ Some reviews of the video interpreted it as referring to or actually being about the real American hostages Terry Anderson, Thomas Sutherland, Benjamin Weir, Marting Jenco, and David Jacobsen, like in the online Video Data Bank <http://www.vdb.org/titles/hostage-bachar-tapes-english-version>

¹⁸² Raad continues: "So, this man seemed to be more of a rumor of a person," I responded. "Originally, though, you presented him as the real thing?" "Yes. But the main character is played by a well-known Lebanese actor, so he's less likely to be confused in Lebanon. But outside, he is usually confused as a real hostage. Sometimes it doesn't really bother me that it is thought to be real. And then at other times, I'm a bit troubled by the confusion." (ibid).

“Arab art,” But what fascinates him most about these two new appearances are the contrasting material appearance and tradition of disappearances.¹⁸³

Raad’s friend and colleague Shelley Rice writes, “Walid has decided to frame the history of Art in the Arab World by chronicling the inevitability of its material, aesthetic and conceptual withdrawal.” (Rice 2012). Indeed, his installation for documenta 13 was immense and detailed, mirroring the walls of a gallery exhibition; some fragmented others whole, with hundreds of pieces of archival material and many empty frames or shadows. Raad includes a narrative on the shadows in Walid Sadek’s work, *Love Is Blind*, (referencing another artists from his generation) in which he refers to details of a painting by Mustafa Farroukh, the founder of a national Lebanese art movement, but never shows the painting. Raad says he asked Sadek to borrow his installation, and when Sadek refused Raad instead incorporated the shadows of the unseen work, perhaps illustrating the impossibility of one artist standing in for the whole of a region or history. Sadek has also written on the “inflation” of Lebanese art and its confessional aspect of narrating their own histories.¹⁸⁴

Rabih Mroué is also concerned with the incompleteness of personal testimony. In *The Pixelated Revolution* (2012), which, like Raad, he performed as a lecture at Documenta 13, Mroué takes a more literal approach. He shows the cell phone images and videos he has collected online, all of victims of the on-going civil war in Syria, and compares them

¹⁸³ On his project webpage, Raad writes: “I am not interested in identifying and unpacking the complex and/or simple motives that prompt the sheikhs and sheikhas, emirs, kings, princes, ministers of culture and others in the Gulf and elsewhere in the Arab world to invest massively in the arts. Rather, I concentrate on some of the gestures, stories, forms and colors made available by the emerging infrastructures, especially when these are screened alongside Jalal Toufic’s concept of “the withdrawal of tradition past a surpassing disaster.” (Raad 2012)

¹⁸⁴ “By 2003, one could speak of an inflation concerning contemporary Lebanese art. The contradictions were conspicuous. Lebanese art was marking the calendar of the international circuit at a time when the socio-political situation in the country was regressing alarmingly. Artists, it seemed, could do nothing else except carry on the trend of addressing and divulging to an international audience.” (Sadek 2011, 44)

to an aesthetic of the moving image found in street photography, developed by Danish collective Dogme 95.¹⁸⁵



Rabih Mroué performing *The Pixelated Revolution*, Staatstheater, Kassel, Documenta 13, June 7, 2012. Copyright: ATP/Ibraaz Publishing, 2012.

Image 3x. Performance by Rabih Mroué performing *The Pixelated Revolution* at documenta 13 (2012), photo from Ibraaz Contemporary Visual Culture in North Africa and the Middle East website, www.ibraaz.org.

Each of these works at documenta 13 contained stories within stories – some encapsulated in a time capsule that resembles trash, others within the cellphones, images

¹⁸⁵ Fawz Kabra describes Mroué's performance of a lecture: "He analyses the cinematic methods of the 'amateur' videos of violence captured on mobile phones and finds similarities between them and the Danish Dogme 95 film collective and its aesthetic. Written in 1995 by Lars von Trier and Thomas Vinterberg, the group's manifesto posits the rules of this style of film production as follows: 'Shooting must be done on location, the sound must never be produced apart from the images, the camera must be hand-held, the film must be in colour, filters are forbidden, no superficial action, the director must not be credited'. Mroué identifies these rules in the videos shown, thus generating a new manifesto: the sacred dogma of how to document violence during a time of revolution and indiscriminate death." (Kabra 2012)

liberated to the internet and recaptured for a contemporary artwork, others within the shadows of absence. In 2014 Nat Muller contrasts a generation of Beirut artists who came of age during the civil war and rose to fame afterwards in the 1990s/2000s with image-based art that took post-crisis history as its theme (Mroué, Raad, Zaatari, and their contemporaries) with a younger 2010s generation, not yet “biennialised,” as bringing “humor, pop culture, and an understanding of the expectations and pressures of the local and international contemporary art world into the mix.” (Muller 2014) ¹⁸⁶

Mueller’s assesses the Beirut art scene with a linear move through art history, from ‘image-based’ to ‘material-driven’, sounding very similar to ‘object-based’ to ‘conceptual’ idea of how art history developed in other areas of the world. But unlike in other scenes, Beirut artists like Raad and Zaatari created a whole infrastructure of large art projects archival in nature (The Arab Image Foundation, Hangar Umam, Homeworks) ¹⁸⁷ which they developed from artist collective into arts institutions and public banks of images and concepts, and which continue to influence local art production and younger artists, perhaps even rivalling the role of the art university.

Cairo Generation

¹⁸⁶ Full quote: “In this uncertain climate, the small but vibrant Lebanese art scene thrived. ... Walid Raad, Akram Zaatari, Joana Hadjithomas & Khalil Joreige, Lamia Joreige and Rabih Mroué, made furore in the international art world. Their work has largely been pre-occupied with a coming to terms with the aftermath of the Civil War and an interest in individual and collective history, memory and amnesia, the archival, and the politics of representation (after disaster). Recently, a younger generation of artists, all in their early to mid-30s, have stepped in. Building on the thematic and visual language of their more senior colleagues, these artists bring humour, pop culture, and an understanding of the expectations and pressures of the local and international contemporary art world into the mix. Examples are Mounira al Solh, Raed Yassin, Ziad Antar, Ali Cherri, and the popular painter Ayman Baalbaki. Whereas the practices of the post-Civil War generation are primarily image-based (video, film, photography) artists such as Rayanne Tabet, Danielle Genadry and Stephanie Saadé’s work is material-driven in terms of concept and execution.” (Muller 2014)

¹⁸⁷ Mueller describes some of these new institution-like, artist-led initiatives: “An interest in the archival is also a driving force for organisations such as the unique Arab Image Foundation, around since 1997, that studies and preserves the photographic heritage of the Middle East and North Africa, and Umam D&R, founded in 2004, a non-profit located in the Southern suburbs of Beirut, dedicated to the archiving and study of Lebanon’s national past and the memory of its Civil War.” (2014)

In the reviews of documenta 13, the artwork by the generation of Egyptian artists was often mentioned in connection with the works by the Beirut artists – commentators noted how the revolution was present and absent in their works, the documentary aspects, as if their work constituted pieces of a whole constructed in the viewer’s mind. Was it because people read into them the importance of the Arab Spring, saw them as the building of a region; were there actual (or imagined) similarities in theme and material choice (or dialogues even between the artists)? Or is the reason for their comparison related to the fact that many of the art historians and critics who write in English on one of these cities usually covers the other as well, as two parts of a regional whole? Which strategies have been used to not homogenise the region, and instead highlight a diversity of perspectives?

Artists Wael Shawky (1971), Hassan Khan (1975) and Ahmed Basyony (1978) come from two waves of related artist generations, which include artists from both Alexandria and Cairo. This group is best known in Cairo for their engagement with global art and international appeal to audiences outside Egypt.¹⁸⁸ But their stories are also intertwined locally, like in the history of Cairo’s annual Youth Salon, a phenomenon backed by the state and analysed by American anthropologist Jessica Winegar, in her work on Cairene contemporary artists. The Salon began in 1989 with the intent of fostering young generations of artists and expands visibility around this theme. Basyony took the first prize in painting in the Youth Salon of 2001; Shawky participated in several salons of the 1990s before winning the prize for a mixed media installation in 1994, and for the 20th edition of the salon in 2009, both Hassan Khan and Shawky served as judges.

Winegar, describing the context of the salon’s beginnings, describes the significance of 1989 as year one and the local cultural sector:

¹⁸⁸ Sara el Kamel reports in AlAhram in 2014: “Producing works that critically engage with the global art discourse, Wael Shawky is part of a group of contemporary Egyptian artists – including Hassan Khan, Bassim Magdy, and Yousef Nabil – who have garnered significant interest abroad. His works have been displayed at the Biennale di Venezia (2003), the 12th Istanbul Biennale (2011), Documenta 13 in Kassel (2012) and the 11th Sharjah Biennale (2013) among other international venues.”

The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 signified the end of the Cold War and the emergence of a new world order. The Young British Artists (YBAs) became all the rage. That same year, the visual art scene in Egypt was put on a new course by the creation of the Salon al-Shabab, the major state art exhibition... in which young artists were encourage to be “flexible” and to mix what were thought to be “local” and international” media, styles, or concepts.” (Winegar 2006, 287)¹⁸⁹

Perhaps akin to the themes identified by Cuauhtémoc Medina in the aesthetic formation of the Mexican new wave conceptualist generation, (the pillars of the independent curator, the increase in artist run and alternative spaces, and the desire for independence with networks between local artists and a global art scene), Winegar identifies three forces which tried to define what a young generation of Egyptian artists could represent in the 1990s (though not always with positive results). Foreign curators and local gallerists tried to emphasize the young generation’s divide from both the older generation and the state funded art projects, while this generation of artists themselves held many forums on the subject, and the state worked to promote the kind of balance she describes above, between local and international, which they hoped would frame this generation of artist and their presence in the international scene. Jumping forward to the meaning of the salon in its 2009 when Shawky and Khan formed part of the judging panel, Omnia El Shakry demonstrates how 24 years later, even after the Culture Minister Farouk Hosni who oversaw the event since its inception was removed from power in the revolution, the issues of identity binaries still persist:

Rather than simply view the Salon as embodying conflicts between generations or around identity politics, I argue that the disputes surrounding the arbitration of aesthetic judgment were coded as a series of binaries: local–global, government sponsored–artist sponsored, authentic–contemporary, and nationalist–neo-liberal. (El Shakry 2009)¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁹ She continues, “As the Egyptian government was enacting neoliberal reforms in the economic sector (or giving lip service to them), in the cultural sector, it was contributing to the production of a new kind of national subject among young artists – one that was secular, “progressive,” and amenable to the new direction in which Egypt was heading.” (ibid).

¹⁹⁰ El Shakry continues: “Such binary representations seek to unequivocally categorize art, and mirror authoritative public discourse on art in Egypt, which seeks to delegitimize forms of artistic production that do not conform to the imperative to produce artistic work that is at once contemporary and nationalist, or at least identifiably “Egyptian.” Clearly, similar parallels may be found elsewhere in postcolonial and/or post socialist contexts. Thus, Igor Zabel has discussed the Russian context and the curatorial constraints surrounding the presentation of works of art that cannot be seen solely as art, but must always be inflected by their locale (revealing a “Russian essence,” for example), while Western art alone is considered as icon

The identity function of non-western art has been a key issue in the Cairene arts scene, where this idea of the work necessitating an aesthetic inclusive of what El Shakry calls “contemporary and nationalist, or at least identifiably ‘Egyptian,’” is present in the variety of venues and arts spaces. In the private gallery sponsored¹⁹¹ Nitaq Festival, also foundational to this generation, the theme was present in 2001 in works by Khan and Shawky. Al-Ahram weekly reported: “all three installations incorporated elements of Egyptian culture, employed video and invited the viewer to explore and discover.” (Rakha and Elmessiri 2001)¹⁹²

True to form, each of the works by the three Egyptian artists in documenta 13 featured images easily identifiable as Egyptian paired with new genres mediums, albeit in three very different contexts. Shawky, whom Winegar describes as at the centre of the disagreements between the new school and old school of Egyptian art during the time when he won the Youth Salon prize for installation in 1994, presented a piece referencing Islamic history with the Cabaret Crusades: The Horror Show File (2010), two video pieces starring Italian renaissance marionettes.¹⁹³

of “contemporary art.” While all contemporary art is clearly “constitutively stained” by its location, only non-Western art is expected to have questions of identity function as a touchstone.” (El Shakry 2009)

¹⁹¹ These galleries were Karim Francis, Mashrabia and the Townhouse Gallery. For more on this see Negar Azimi, “Townhouse Gallery. Art Scene Egypt,” Nafas Art Magazine, August 2004, http://universes-in-universe.org/eng/nafas/articles/2004/townhouse_gallery.

¹⁹² Full quote: “Installations captured the mood of the opening night and the dynamics of Nitaq -- its more engrossing aspect -- more effectively. In the Townhouse alone, Shadi El-Noshokaty, Hassan Khan and Wael Shawqi dealt respectively with family history, personal identity as an aspect of everyday life and the clash of indigenous and contemporary culture. Constructed respectively in white, black and grey, all three installations incorporated elements of Egyptian culture, employed video and invited the viewer to explore and discover.” (Al-ahram weekly)

¹⁹³ Farquharson describes the experience of the piece for a Frieze Magazine review as: “Often, artists in the exhibition transpose material from one historically and culturally resonant condition to another, suggesting alternative trajectories history might have taken or might still take. In the second part of Wael Shawky’s two-part video Cabaret Crusade (2012), antique Italian puppets become specific historical protagonists in an ingenious re-telling of the first and second Crusades from an Arab perspective, through subtle shifts in the marionettes’ costumes and beautifully crafted sets.” (Farquharson and Wilson-Goldie 2012)



dOCUMENTA (13), Fast Tour
A first tour through the dOCUMENTA (13), 9 June - 16 Sept. 2012 in Kassel, Germany. Some works at different venues.

Wael Shawky
* 1971 Alexandria, Egypt; lives there.
[more info & photos](#)

See also:



Extensive Photo Tour
Documenta 13 - A selection of art works at most of the venues: Photos & information.

© Still: Wael Shawky
Repro: Haupt & Binder



Keramik-Köpfe für das Historien-Epos: Vitrine mit 27 Marionetten aus dem Video-Film "Cabaret Crusades - The Path to Cairo" von Wael Shawky. Foto: ohe

[vorheriges](#)

Bild 6 von 8

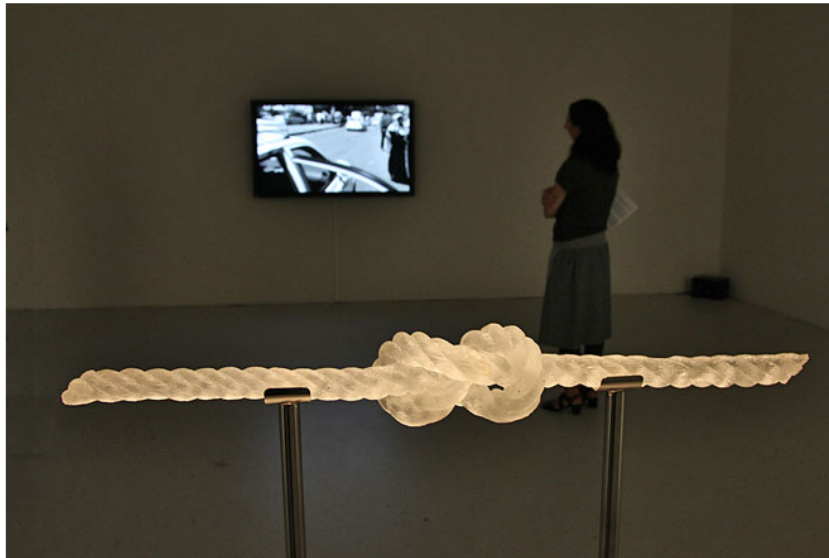
[nächstes](#)

Image 3y and 3z. Wael Shawky's Cabaret Crusades: The Horror Show File at documenta 13 (2012), photo of video still from Universes in Universe website. Installation shot photo from Kunst+Film website, <http://kunstundfilm.de>.

By showing work about the Crusades from “an Arab perspective” (perhaps as limiting as descriptive of a term), Shawky highlighted a piece of pre-Arab Spring history, but also continued his practice of what Amina Malik identifies as ‘political Islam’ (Malik, 309).¹⁹⁴ with works that mixes traditions initiated in the West with cultural themes from the East, be they religious or historical. Like his piece *The Cave* (2004), featuring a “theme of consumption woven into ritual” and describes the work as “draw[ing] out the complications of a secular assumption underlying artistic practice under globalization that remains implicit when ritual is placed under the category of the premodern.” One might even argue that the transformations currently taking place within contemporary art demand a recognition that since 9/11 we have entered a post-secular age.” (Malik 316) Sara Elkamel writes that Shawky’s work often “uses photography, installation, video and performance art to re-construct historical accounts and literary texts, forcing viewers to deconstruct their own perceptions of what is true and what is mythical” (ElKamel 2014).

“Anyway, people talk about revolution all the fucking time,” (Wilson-Goldie 2012) was part of Hassan Khan’s answer to why he chose to make no mention of the revolution in his artwork at documenta 13. Khan used mobile phone cameras to shoot his commissioned film for the show, *Blind Ambition*, in which time and everyday banter become central issues, “with actors cast in situations where the social bonds are composed of idle talk – conversation as material – the piece offers an incredibly complex, jigsaw-puzzle picture of class relations in Cairo – all of which preceded and persisted through the thwarted 18-day revolution that began in Egypt on 25 January 2011.” (Farquharson and Wilson-Goldie).

¹⁹⁴ Malik posits that this term “refers here to the rise of Islam as a contemporary political force that has its history in anticolonial struggles but has come in recent years to be associated with the Wahabbi sect of Islam and violent jihadist tendencies.” In page 309 of her essay.



© Photo: Haupt & Binder

DOCUMENTA (13), Fast Tour
A first tour through the
DOCUMENTA (13), 9 June - 16
Sept. 2012 in Kassel, Germany.
Some works at different
venues.

Hassan Khan
* 1975 London, UK. Lives in
Cairo, Egypt.
[more info & photos](#)

See also:



Extensive Photo Tour
Documenta 13 - A selection of
art works at most of the
venues: Photos & information.

Image 3.1a. Hassan Khan's sculpture *The Knot* (2012) in front of his video *Blind Ambition* commissioned for documenta 13 (2012), photo from Universes in Universe website.

The stories Khan constructs within the mobile phone camera and within the public spheres of his city represent cosmologies, which could (and do) exist before, during and after mega events like the revolution. "It's as if they make the world every time they speak. But this world possesses them, too," (Wilson-Goldie 2012) he says about the actors he directed in the film.

In Basiony's piece at documenta 13, we witness the end of his artistic world which came to a close with the end of his life, in a video document that he filmed days before being shot by snipers on the street during the Tahrir Square revolution.



Video made by the artist on 25 January 2011 at Tahrir Square in Cairo, 3 days before he died of gunshot wounds inflicted by police snipers on the square.

© Photo: Haupt & Binder

Documenta 13, 2012

9 June - 16 Sept. 2012 in Kassel, Germany. Artistic director: Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev. Photo tour: Works at the Fridericianum.

Ahmed Basiony
* 1970 Cairo, Egypt. Died on 28 Jan. 2011 of gunshot wounds inflicted by police snipers on Tahrir Square.
[more info & photos](#)

See also:



Ahmed Basiony
At the frontline of the arts and revolution. His art projects, teaching, last days. By Shady El Noshokaty, Nafas Art Magazine, March 2011.



Ahmed Basiony. From day 2: a documentary video, January 26th, Cairo. Video stills. Courtesy the Estate of Ahmed Basiony.

Images 3.1b and 3.1c. Stills from Ahmed Basiony's video documenting the revolution featured in documenta 13, photos from Universes in Universe website and the estate of Ahmed Basiony.

Information about Basiony's death is included at the beginning (front and first, just after naming Cairo as his birthplace) in his biography of the exhibition. This is an uncommon strategy regarding the rest of the 300+ participants in the exhibition, most (if not all) of whom did not have the details nor location of their death included in their biographies. In the video we see what Basiony saw in his last days of his life, which were also the first days of the revolution: young men with heads bowed in prayer against a night time backdrop of high rises, the ephemeral, metal architecture of protests and riots, and the fire and rocks exchanged between tanks and protesters. Some of his posts from his Facebook page accompany the video.

Basiony's last piece was also included in the Venice Biennale of 2011, in which the artist represented his country posthumously. Khan and other artists have contextualised this act within the on-going politics surrounding the art of these generations and the state. In an interview with *Al-Masry Al-Youm*,¹⁹⁵ he speaks about the event with "mixed feelings", questioning why Basiony's experimental arts practice was only validated by the state after his death by sniper bullet during the revolution:

HK: I have to say that I have mixed feelings about it. I think Basiony was an interesting artist. The really sad thing about the selection is that neither Basiony's practice, nor those of other artists from his generation would have been represented at the Egyptian pavilion in Venice had he not been martyred on 28 January. I know that Shady el-Noshokaty who proposed the idea to the Culture Ministry is absolutely sincere in his motivations. Had it been the ministry's idea, I would have been immediately against it because I'm sure their reasons would have been exploitative. The most dangerous thing for revolution is representation, unless it has clear goals and aims that serve the revolution practically. (Elwakil 2011)

At documenta 13, the theme of the revolution in Cairo can be conceptualised in another way: Shawky's piece is about before the revolution, Basiony's is about the moment of the revolution, and Khan's is about before, during, and after.

¹⁹⁵ In the interview, Khan is asked, "You've made your approach to the Venice Biennale clear. And going back to Venice, how do you feel about the selection of works by the late Ahmed Basiony for the Egyptian pavilion at the Biennale?" (Elwakil 2011)

A few biennial pitfalls

Generations are important to the story of art in the 21st century, but perhaps more interesting because of their strategies and methodologies of collectivism rather than for their market value as a collective unit. We get a hint of this when Sadek writes about the trend of transnational divulgement as a collective strategy by the Beirut school at the turn of the century, or when Orozco speaks of the *Taller de los Viernes* as an alternative education. These narratives are embedded as well with ideas, musings, reactions and interventions into the cities in which they live and work, the hometown context.

Biennials often try to purchase and appropriate this kind of local collectivism by associating themselves with artist-run and alternative spaces in – albeit usually in a peripheral way -- like documenta 13's Cairo Seminar, or even the Liverpool Biennial's well-meaning tradition of commissioning work by local organisations – and they also inspire local counter-exhibitions (like the Al Nitaq Festival or DCAF organised as counter-exhibitions to the Cairo Biennial).¹⁹⁶ But one biennial in particular, one of the few if not only started by a locally operating artist collective of humble beginnings, has offered perhaps the most thought-provoking critique of the pitfalls and flaws of the biennial system. For three editions the Ghetto Biennial (2009, 2011, 2013), started by the Haitian artist collective Atis Rezistans from the neighbourhood of Grand Rue¹⁹⁷ has brought local and foreign artists to their hometown of Port-Au-Prince, focusing on social practice, mixing art with street culture, and famously asking in their slogan, “What happens when first world art rubs up against third world art? Does it bleed?” Conjuring

¹⁹⁶ Nat Muller posits that the second edition of the Al Nitaq festival, organized by the Townhouse gallery and two other private galleries, was proposed as a “counter programme” to the state-run Cairo Biennial. p 112 Afropolis.

¹⁹⁷ On their website, Atis Rezistans describe their neighbourhood as “an area that traditionally has produced small handicrafts for the ever-diminishing tourism market”. Other sources refer to it as “the greenwich village of Port-Au-Prince, home to artists of all types” (<http://www.possessionessions.com/2011/05/artists-of-grand-rue-after-quake.html>) Other sources refer to parts or all of Grand Rue as “a slum” (a few of many: <http://hyperallergic.com/100563/the-many-contradictions-of-a-ghetto-biennale/> <http://16beavergrou.org/mondays/2010/03/18/thursday-03-18-10-haiti-event-w-port-au-prince-artist-andre-eugene-others-screening-of-atis-rezistans-the-sculptors-of-the-grand-rue/> http://yoonsoo.com/files/ghetto_2011/2009/files/call.html)

up notions of the Havana Biennale, its predecessor which touted itself as the promoter of third world art in the 1980s, it directly engages with the taboos of the 21st century biennial, starting with the title, naming the difference between third and first worlds, between class difference and the violence which created these rifts -- a violence understood by Quijano as an integral, devastating part of the coloniality of power.

The Ghetto Biennale has been lauded as “a grassroots attempt to enter the global art world” (Zeidler 2012). It has been criticised as poverty tourism and for its shameless attempt to commodify Haitian art by entering into the biennial system, for producing “depressingly faux-indigenous” art by visiting artists from the artworld centres, and pairing the seemingly opposite ideas of biennial (extreme wealth) and ghetto (extreme poverty). In addition to unabashedly engaging with the unspoken taboos of the art world centre, it also modifies some of the standardised biennial strategies in innovative ways. The visiting artists who are chosen to participate by the organising committee (members of Atis Rezistans and a different Northern curator each year) have to create their artworks using only resources on the island, obliging them to use the strategy Haitian artists often use of scavenging for materials from trash. (Vanneschi 2014). In the discussions, workshops and pairings of artist collaborations, the organising committee addresses the crossing of class and national boundaries, as curator Leah Gordon describes: “The Ghetto Biennale is trying to put a new twist on the decentralization of the Global Art World, and connect the Haitian artists from lower classes to an international, artistic field, to narrow the still existing gap between periphery and the metropolis,” (Meir 2011).

“Atis Rezistans use recycled materials for their works. But [its]... not just dealing with Haitian culture and the reappropriation of junk,” (Gordon cited in ArtReview 2013) speculated David Frohnappfel, a German art historian who co-curated the second edition, using the metaphor of the appropriation of junk in found art. Leah Gordon, who helped Atis Rezistans found the exhibition added, “Another important part of their practice is the reappropriation of bourgeois art world institutions. André has named his yard ‘a Musée d'Arte’, declaring that not only the bourgeois can have galleries and museums.” (ibid).



Images 3.1d. A work by Emily Boone at the Ghetto Biennial installed in a neighbourhood instead of a white cube, image by Jesse Metcalf, Multiversal Services.

The goal is to insert Haitian artists into the rosca of the biennial circuit, in hopes that their works will gain value through exposure and networks with Northern artists and curators, as Miriam Vanneschi explains in her review:

The concept was born from a conversation between Haitian artist André Eugène and British artist Leah Gordon, who had been coming to Haiti since 1991; they discussed the extreme difficulty that Haitian artists face in obtaining travel visas to almost anywhere in the world, whether they're invited or not. The pair came up with the idea of a biennale as a kind of Trojan Horse, the idea being that if the art and artists could not be taken out of the slums, then other art and artists would be taken into the slums, and networks established regardless of visa politics. (Vanneschi 2014).

In addition to the Trojan horse metaphor, she contrasts it with another biennial symbol, that of the white cube:

The surroundings were difficult but incredibly rewarding; a minimalist sculpture that has a developing nation's chaotic capital city as background is experienced in a completely different way than if it were in a white cube. (ibid)

Polly Savage and Caitlin Lennon have offered insightful analysis on the deeper meaning of biennial in relation to the formats and functioning of other biennials. A summary of their critiques permits another kind of understanding of the biennial form:

- Biennials (as well as biennial artists and biennial art) have used as “raw inspiration” marginalized and resource-poor zones (and their communities), objectifying them as material for art (the trap of the allure of primitivism)
- Biennial artworks and curatorial practices have romanticised the precarious and deprived space (noted for its absence of infrastructure, regulations and state services) as autonomous and revolutionary space
- As part of the art institution, biennials present the danger of unregulated zones of creativity becoming institutional models
- With the treatment of indigenous art and territorialising of “new” geographies, biennials have played a role in the commodification of the subaltern

These four issues, together with the first four characteristics I describe at the beginning of this chapter, are of key importance to the creating of two genres within the global art context of the 21st century: contemporary Latin American art and contemporary Arab art. The following two sections explore the analysis of these eight phenomena in the constant construction and reconstruction of these two contemporary art genres.

Quasi-biennials

What is a quasi-biennial? An imposter, a wannabe, an almost-biennial, a self-styled or mock exhibitiona Trojan horse biennial? In John Clark’s typology of biennials he draws a line between the transnational biennial and all other kinds (local, national, international). According to Clark, quasi-biennials are “exhibitions of ‘nationally’ selected art shown overseas as a representative selection from current practice”¹⁹⁸ In the case of the imagining and selling of the South on a global market, these kinds of exhibitions, which Clark names quasi-biennials, have been largely used as the instrument for creating genres like contemporary Arab art or contemporary Latin American art.

¹⁹⁸ For more on this idea see Pauline Yao, “The Second Triennial of Chinese Art: History in the Making,” *Yishu Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art* 4, No. 5, September 2005.

Since 1989, exhibitions about identity –or identity exhibitions— continued the new geographic ideas proposed by Magiciens de la Terre and the 3rd Havana Biennial with the ethnographic/anthropological strategy of presenting “new” regions one exhibition at a time. Also called survey exhibitions, this form of contemporary art expression raised questions about the existence of an aesthetic for each continent or region. Sometimes they suggested new geographies – including North Africa or Asia in the Middle East or excluding Mexico as part of North America. These kinds of exhibitions proposed the seemingly impossible task of defining and uniting hugely diverse terrains under with titles like: Africa Now (1991), Art in Latin America (1989), Contemporary Art from the Islamic World (1989). These exhibitions were unique in that their scale was enormous, featuring hundreds of artists and touring cities in several continents. They continue to grow in size and location, and increasingly their catalogues are turned into well-funded, large art books, which are available in bookstores and libraries in an even greater number of large cities. This phenomenon then set the parameters of thought for the way curators conceptualise a particular region on the stage of a global art scene. It works with the rosca system of other biennials (quasi and non-quasi) to place artworks and places in dialogue primarily with the North, and to a lesser extent propose South-South dialogues.

Nikos Papastergiadis, an editor of Third Text journal, has written much on the imagining of the South through this new kind of internationalism in survey exhibitions and biennials since 1989. In *The South in the North* (1991) described the kind of issues presented in this new approach to the paradigm of North/South or first/third world divides, in his critique of the 1991 exhibition *The South of the world: The other contemporary art*. In his work on reinventions of the South in art and cultures, he devises his argument around the key points of a common post-colonial past, conceptualising the theoretical flows as spherical rather than criss-crossing the globe, contrasting “emergent practices” with “historical legacies” of art from the South, as a means for countering the three-pronged stereotype of exotic, peripheral and primitive. He explains the basic premise of his recounting of theorising around the South since the early 1990s:

The idea of the South has a long history. In the recent past it has been revived as a possible frame for representing the cultural context not just of regions that are geographically located in the South, but also those that share a common post colonial heritage. I argue that the South can extend the existing debates on cross cultural exchange, and provide a useful perspective for representing what I call a 'spherical consciousness' in contemporary art.... (Papastergiadis 2014)¹⁹⁹

Emphasising the newness of artistic practices from the South – aka “emergent” – and the oldness of the South’s past – aka “historical legacies”, Papastergiadis draws our attention to a new present for the South. Perhaps this is an inaccurate reading, as there have always been artistic practices in every era, especially in the urban South. What is new about them is not their on-going existence but their appearance in the North, in the global artworld – a truth that denotes more of a quality of pseudo-newness. Quasi-newness, even? But what does this present look like – does it rely equally on “new” practices and “old” local histories? Who makes visible this present and what is left out? When the third world was re-named as the South, and the North became re-interested in the territorialisation of this space, many questions arose: What is art from the Islamic world? How is an artwork from Cuba particularly Caribbean? What is Asian American about a particular work? Categories like “Latin American Art” or “Muslim Art” seemed to appear out of nowhere on the Western map of global art history. Survey art exhibitions stemming from questions like these began to proliferate in the last 20th century, marking it as a time of narratives and counter-narratives about the South in the North.

An example can be found in the shaping of Latin America as a contemporary art genre in the late 1980s. In direct response to a Hayward Gallery exhibition, *Art in Latin America* (1989), which promoted the kind of primitivism critiqued by Papastergiadis, London curator Guy Brett produced *Transcontinental: An Investigation of Reality – Nine Latin American Artists* (1990). It featured artists from Latin America whose work directly responded to the themes put forth in *Art in Latin America*. Brett’s goal was to tell a story of difference, and of political works that critiqued the primitivisation and othering of

¹⁹⁹ He continues, “The introduction of the Derridean concept of supplementary and Homi Bhabha’s interpretation of the process of cultural translation provided new means for understanding both the tensions that arise from the interaction between different cultural practices, and the emergence of novel forms of expressions. This approach [in *Third Text*] not only provided more evidence of emergent practices and the historical legacies of art from the South, but it also prompted the invention of critical tools for overcoming the classification of the South as *exotica*, *periphery* and *primitivism*.”

Latin American art. While Brett apologised for continuing to label the show “Latin American” (when it excluded many areas of Latin America), his aim was to begin to present plurality and a depth of themes in the field. The catalogue was only published during the run of the show, and has been out of print since 1990. Today it can only be found in a handful of art and university libraries.

A work from this show, by Chilean-Australian artist Juan Davila, illustrates the power of these parameters and definitions put forth by large identity exhibitions in the 1990s. As part of a commissioned piece, he writes a letter to curator Guy Brett, explaining how Transcontinental was a response to a false construction of Latin American art from a previous show in the Hayward Gallery. Davila’s piece is also a response to the kind of essentialism, a way of finding a brand of unity whose side effects erase diversity and create a product. I include some excerpts here with my emphasis on key parts of Davila’s argument which would come to be defining questions as the genre of contemporary Latin American art continued to take shape (see appendix for full letter):

Melbourne, 30 January, 1990.

“Dear Guy,

In the invitation to this exhibition you mention as a reference the atmosphere created by the large art-historical exhibition shown last year at the Hayward Gallery in London. In my opinion that exhibition is a good example of a dominant view. **Latin America appears there as exotic, primitive, quaint, pure.** That is expressed by **the erasure of all national art histories turning the continent into one place**, by applying to the cultural material classifications of periods and genres that originate in the **European sense of history** and also by using **a concept of time and space** that is Unitarian. Latin America in that schema shows a **failed ‘modernisation’** where the battles against despotism, social inequality and servitude became the ‘great narratives’ of history... At the Hayward exhibition that continent undergoes a similar metamorphosis: it is **now a culture without poverty or violence, a place without a voice** – no discourse generated there is offered – and because the show is a sort of historical compendium, **a place without a present** (recent art is not included)...

Latin America is not a constituted culture around a clear nucleuse of identity where cultural materials are sediment: its technical rationality is different to the European one, **its imaginary life is dual (outside the modern versus non-modern dichotomy) and its links between history and time differs in the sense that it has a sequential and simultaneous time (Anibal Quijano).**

How can one avoid bringing to the European market new products? Latin America can be a dominant subculture in the dominant culture, **a pleasing product – as the Hayward exhibition demonstrates – for the old demand.**

Yours sincerely,

Juan Davila

Davila's point about large narrative exhibitions which reassign their own definitions (time, space, history, imaginary life) and categories (primitive, exotic, quaint, pure, the marginal, third world) reveals much about the way quasi-biennials have functioned as part of the design of geography-based art genres. "A place without a present" became the dominant assumption about not just Latin America, but about many other regions in the South. The 21st century machinery of the biennial could be read to largely deal with the defining of these presents – of these elsewheres which only existed in the past in the European imaginary. The use of Quijano's recognition of time and space outside modernist dualities, however, was not a key element picked upon in the creating of this genre and biennials, which continue to operate largely still within time and space colonial paradigms. Although Davila hints at the possibility of a way out, a option of not "brining to the European market new products," his letter is more preoccupied with engaging in the struggle for territory on global shores.

When Davila writes of using "the dominant language in order to convey the voice of Latin America rearticulating both cultural heritages," it seems to foreshadow the battles of territorialisation at the heart of the controversial issues behind quasi-biennials like Art of the Fantastic and Inverted Utopias. Twenty years after Davila exhibited his letter, Miguel Angel López used the term "minor expressions" to articulate the position of Latin American conceptual artists, and the curatorial narratives in exhibitions on this subject, to speak about the way artworks and curatorial acts from this region used the dominant language of conceptualism (Lopez 2010). He borrows from Deleuze and Guattari's concept of minor literature, in an interesting move that makes several proposals for understanding minor expressions as artworks, actions and exhibitions from the South. The three components of Deleuze and Guattari's minor literature, which "a minority constructs within a major language" and that it is marginal, politicized, and collective

(Deleuze and Guattari 1986, 16).

Twenty years earlier, Davila made a very similar proposal, using as metaphor the work of Peruvian author José María Arguedas, in a very similar way that Deleuze and Guattari use Kafka to understand this concept. They based their analysis on linguistic theory contrasting four kinds of language: 1) the vernacular (a language of territorialisation, according to Deleuze and Guattari), 2) vehicular (official, commercial and a language of deterritorialisation), 3) referential (“of sense and of culture”, cultural reterritorialisation) and 4) mythic (spiritual, religious, also of reterritorialisation). In explaining the spatio-temporal side of these four categories, they write: “vernacular is here; vehicular language is everywhere; referential language is over there; mythic language is beyond.” (Deleuze and Guattari 1986, 23). They argued that Kafka’s writing was by nature politicized and revolutionary because it employed each kind of language, and in doing so deterritorialised and challenged the dominant language with a reading of its multiplicities. In his works, Kafka employed a rural or vernacular language (Czech), a mythic language (Hebrew), a referential language (Yiddish, which they describe as “a nomadic movement of deterritorialisation that reworks German), and Prague German, the major language, by which, they say, “he will make the German language take flight on a line of escape.” (Deleuze and Guattari 1986, 25). In *Yawar Fiesta* (1941), his debut novel, and in subsequent works, José María Arguedas used language in similar ways, writing in Peruvian Spanish, Quechua, and a blended version of the two by his own design. An anthropologist and novelist, Arguedas contested the principles of modernisation and national integration in his time, which in South America were built on the erasure of the indigenous in Peru, as well as the elimination of their histories and language (Stavans 1996, 96). As Deleuze and Guattari saw in the promise of Kafka, Davila identified in Arguedas’ work a strategy of subverting from within, the catalyst in a line of flight or vanishing point of the major.

Davila’s questioning of these two worlds and their relationship to each other, a question he posed without using European theorists to explain his point of view, are echoed in the

words of visual artist Tony Chakar, who, 15 years later, writes about the Western art world's struggle to conceptualise the construct of the so-called Arab world. Chakar's questioning occurs in a different political and historical context, as Contemporary Arab art (also referred to as Islamic Art and Middle Eastern Art) developed as a concept in the global art world slightly later than Latin American art. Writing for *Untitled* art journal in 2005, he asks

Does the Arab world exist? The expression is often used, we hear it on CNN, the BBC or Al Jazeera; we read about it in the newspapers in relation to the century-old-Arab-Israeli conflict; we listen to politicians from the four corners of the world making speeches and having opinions about what the Arab world should or should not be like... surely one might think of the existence of a shared language, a long history, in some cases a shared religion, and decide that this is all the proof needed. So why the question? What are the motives behind asking? What would be its potential answer and what would be the consequences of these answers? (Chakar 2003)

Chakar describes the disconnect between local experiences and global interpretations—a situation Davila underlines as well. The frustration of having others measure and interpret the contrasting silhouettes of local, national, regional, and international – fixing them into one identity that then becomes a product. This is what Chakar seems to be asking about questions, motives and consequences, and which Davila answers in his outlining of a misconception about Latin American art formed around these three points. Latin American contemporary art as genre experienced this becoming-process in the late 80s and early 90s, having undergone so many different curatorial positioning through exhibitions that in 2014 it is already passé.

Major galleries and institutions are for the most part, no longer hosting Latin American identity exhibitions – except perhaps possibly those which have arrived late at the conversation. The Guggenheim has been criticised by Holland Cotter in the *New York Times* as ignoring contemporary Latin American art until the 2010s when it started a project to curate three geography-based exhibitions, UBS MAP Global Art Initiative, “showing the work it has paid little attention to in the past” (Cotter 2014). In much the same way Miguel Amado has identified other major museums as wanting to “correct” their narrow-minded collecting policies with a geographic turn, the mapping project featured a 2014 exhibition on art from South and Southeast Asia, followed by a 2014

exhibition on art from Latin America, and finally an exhibition on work from the Middle East and North Africa planned for 2015 (each with a curatorial residency and blog on art scenes in different regional cities). Just as exhibitions dedicated to solely Latin American art have shifted out of style, other geography-based genres like contemporary Asian art and contemporary Arab art have come into fashion in the biennial rosca (which means also in the art world in general), often falling prey to the same processes which so frustrated Davila and Brett.

The Guggenheim mapping project is somewhat attesting to this – it is not by accident that they have chosen a timeline reflecting the chronology of three major trends in the biennial rosca of the 21st century. Returning to Chakar's questions, why should we ask what kind of worlds were created in these constructed histories? What are the motives behind asking, the potential answers and consequences of those answers? What is the value in looking at these two constructed narratives together? To begin to tell a part of this story of the spatio-temporalities of art enshrined in identity exhibitions, I present a non-linear path which starts with 2010 and provides a non-exhaustive background of the kind of quasi-biennials which made the last two genres of the mapping project.

The year 2010 was part of a moment of overlap between two timeframes, at the cusp of the Latin American art boom and early middle of the international craze for Arab contemporary art.²⁰⁰ It was a time when large museums were still in the process of institutionalising, and in many ways internalising the prior, and enchanted by the wave of biennial enthusiasm for the latter. In this year Pablo León de la Barra curated the exhibition *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas, Yucatan and Elsewhere*²⁰¹ at the Centro Cultural España in Guatemala City, and Sam Bardaouil created *Told/Untold/Retold* with Till Fellrath, his partner in the curatorial consulting firm Art Reoriented, for the inauguration of Mathaf Arab Museum of Modern Art in Doha. Both

²⁰⁰ So far I have used the term 'Arab' contemporary art to speak about this phenomenon, but when referring to the creation of genre, here it is necessary to note that the term Middle East is often used here as a synonym or related term to 'Arab' in the field contemporary art, and so I will include exhibitions and studies which use both terms.

²⁰¹ I will refer to this exhibition as *Incidents*.

exhibitions represent new pathways for curatorial expressions in this time period and their respective genres, while relying on tried and true practices, as exhibitions in two “peripheral” art worlds. Both present opinions and doubts about the actual existence of an aesthetic for each genre, genres that were largely initiated and constructed in exhibitions and institutions outside of the region. So how is it significant when these curators – all three educated in Europe and with work trajectories in the North²⁰² – create an exhibition addressing contemporary art from their native region, with the purpose of displaying it in that same region?

Can these be considered minor expressions – are they necessarily political, collective... revolutionary? Which languages are they speaking?

Central to both exhibition themes is an undoing and re-doing of a concept that has operated in the past as a defining piece of each genre. *Incidents* deals head-on with an exoticised view of the indigenous as primitive and touristic from anthropological discourse; *Told/Untold/Retold* rejects the popular limits of geography definitions to focus instead on form over content. The intended audiences for both were threefold: the first and most obvious being the local art scene, the second being the regional artworld – art collectors, artists and institutions in nearby cities of the same regions – and lastly, possibly most consciously, the international art world public clustered in the Northern centres. The latter is most likely of great importance to the curators, whom they address in overt ways through language, and discreet ways through subtexts and artist selection.

In *Told/Untold/Retold* all of the exhibition text is bilingual, Arabic and English, a clear sign that the intended audience is much more than local.

²⁰² In the very brief online biographies of each curator, on their website or blog, each includes in their credentials of graduate school in Europe, as well as proof of work (i.e. teaching and/or curating) in renowned institutions of either Europe or large North American cities, primarily New York. See <http://www.artreoriented.com/index.html> and <http://centrefortheaestheticrevolution.blogspot.com>



Image 3.1e. Bilingual entrance to Told/Untold/Retold exhibition, photo from Universes in Universe website.

In Incidents, the artist selection and exhibition narratives reveal a deeply engrained relationship between art world centres in Europe and North America and a majority of the participants artists, a number of whom were subsequently included in the New York City Guggenheim museum collection and mapping project blog, a process facilitated by Barra. This evidence points to the significance of this kind of “removed audience” -- the intended European and Euro-American audiences from art world centres (whether present or not in Doha and Guatemala City) who read the catalogue and ensuing press or blog text in English, and were witness to exhibitions as important curatorial acts that would generate further reactions from both the media and art world, forming part of curatorial movements of thought and presentation.

Told/Untold/Retold included several rooms; sometimes a separate room for each artist, at other times a whole wall or two for one work. Many of the artworks appeared similar if not almost identical to the works presented at other larger exhibitions, even though all were commissioned for the exhibition, and as curator Fellrath declares in his introductory text, all “were given complete freedom in their choice of subject matter, and were simply asked to share what matters to them, formalistically and semantically,” using the theme of storytelling as a departure point and central theme (Bardouil and Fellrath 65). The curatorial style was very stark, following common practices of the display aesthetic for contemporary art shows. There were black boxes – in which huge screens were the only light, showing images depicting processes from a photography archive in a video work by Akram Zaatari and in another video piece by Adel Abidin, a blonde nightclub singer. And there were also white cube rooms – all white walls with concrete floors dusted in white

paint, where mostly 2-D works hung on walls, some framed and some unframed. In Lamia Joreige's room, these framed images were connected by black lines applied to the wall, an archive resembling distortions of an urban locale. In Walid Raad's section, the framed pictures of bright colours with spots of text here and there were hung on a wall, a piece from the same work he presented at Documenta 13, "Scratching on Things I Could Disavow: A History of Art in the Arab World". Portrait-like paintings by Jeffar Khaldi and Khaled Takreti hung unframed on white walls.

The first version of Incidents was presented in the house-like setting of the Centro Cultural España, amongst the white walls of its galleries and tiled floors. There were found objects: a door from an adolescent's bedroom, and his small yellow chair, decorated with animation and drawings by the child himself, by young Guatemalan artist Rodrigo Fernández Cevallos, one of the two contemporary Guatemalan artists in the exhibition. There were framed renditions of ruins, archaeological engravings and watercolours from centuries past, by British 1800s industrial artist Frederick Catherwood. Sketches and photographs of the Hotel Palenque by the canonical American contemporary artist Robert Smithson were included. The rest of the works featured new genres pieces, like a video of residents drawing their silhouettes in the air, in Frontera Corozal, on the Mexico-Guatemala border, a town which was created in 1976 to re-locate 601 chole families, by Puerto Rican contemporary artist Beatriz Santiago. Santiago produced the piece as a commission for the Exhibition Frontera, 2006-7, created by Mexican curatorial collective Laboratorio Curatorial 060.

Barra curated Incidents shortly before his appointment as curator in residence for the Guggenheim's mapping project on Latin America, then curating a similar version of the same exhibition, Incidents of Mirror Travel in Yucatan and Elsewhere (2011) at the Museo Tamayo in Mexico City.

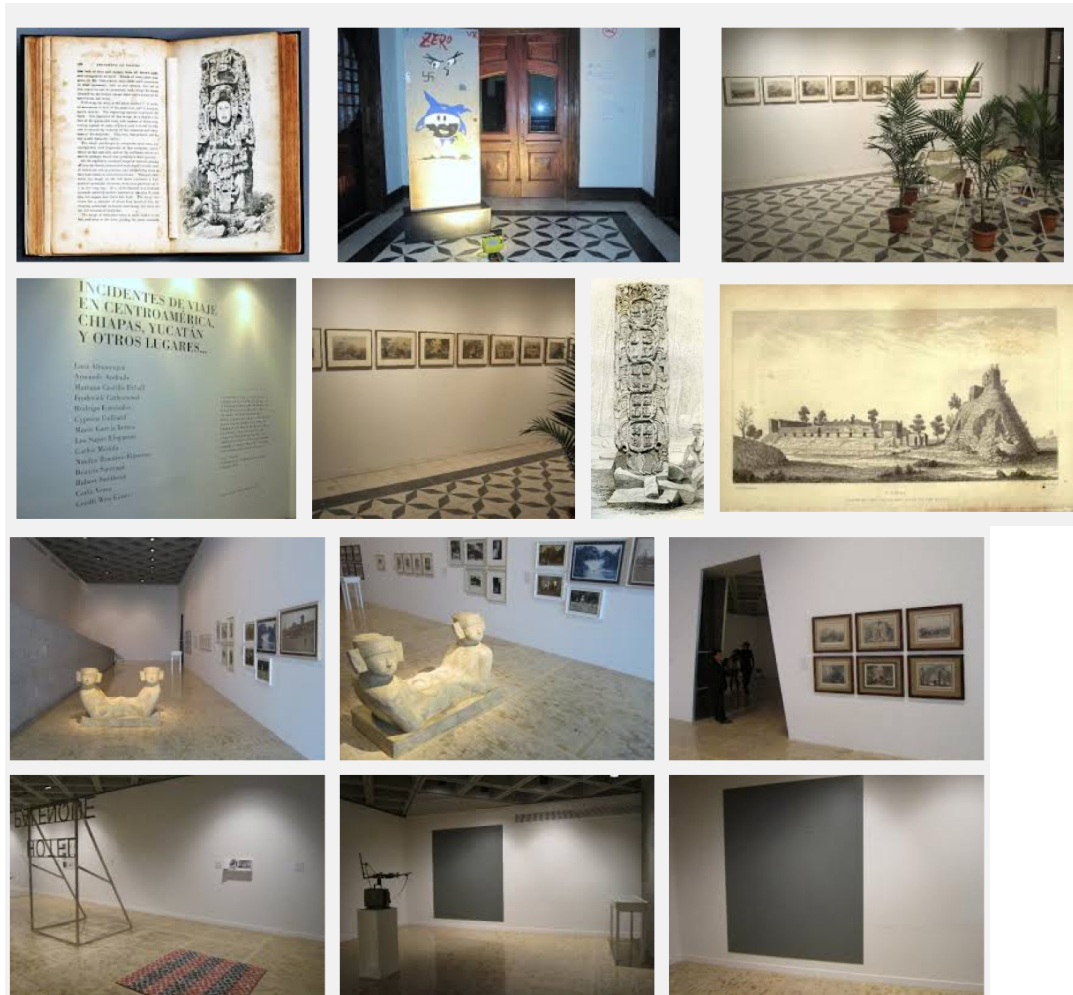


Image 3.1f. Exhibition shots of Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas, Yucatan and Elsewhere at the Centro Cultural España in Guatemala City, all images by Pablo León de la Barra.

The second version had a slightly altered name with an expanded list of artists. Both versions begin with the premise of ruins and the protagonist of the documenter/traveller/tourist in the South, borrowing the title from the 19th century writer John L. Stephens and his good friend, illustrator Frederick Catherwood, whose journeys and exerts from a best-selling book are also displayed alongside contemporary artworks addressing the same theme. Catherwood, a skilled draftsman and architect from London, had incidentally also worked in Egypt, creating renderings of the pyramids, although his most famous works were those representing the Maya (Bourbon 2000). The exhibition text describes Stephens and Cather wood's journeys as firsts in documenting Mayan ruins of these regions in their near entirety, and inspiring a wave of amateurs, explorers and

archaeologists who imitated them. The curatorial choice to highlight the near (but still incomplete) totality of this kind of archive, and its cult-like status sets the stage for an exploration of similar themes in the contemporary works which are shown side by side. The exhibition text also includes a 1969 piece from the work of American artist Robert Smithson, titled “Incidents of Mirror-Travel in the Yucatan, 1969” (Bourbon 2000).

Incidents omits the story of Juan Galindo and his 1834 report on the Guatemalan ruins of Copán, a character whose reputation and account originally inspired Stephens and Catherwood’s journeys to the Mayan territories. In London, the two friends read a local newspaper article published by Galindo describing Copán, a story which intrigued them along with Galindo’s personal story – born in Dublin as John Galindo (to British parents who toured the UK as actors, his great-grandfather having emigrated from Spain), he changed his name to Juan and moved to Guatemala at 18, fighting there against Spanish rule with the liberal army as a coronel, later serving as governor of Petén (Glassman 2007, 146-7). Inspired by the reporting of this tale in British and American newspapers of the time, Stephens and Catherwood set out for the Americas in 1839, in hopes of meeting Galindo, and with the goal of producing a better, more conclusive account of the ruins of the region. Although this story was excluded from the brief exhibition text, it highlights the idea of the trace located in repetition found in the exhibition’s title and theme – a reproduction of a reproduction of a reproduction of a reproduction. Galindo’s rendering of Copán was rendered by Stephens and Catherwood, then again with the trend of archaeologists and amateur explores it inspired, then again more conceptually by American artist Smithson, and again by some of the contemporary artists in Incidents, and then twice again by Barra in his exhibition titles. The brief exhibition text does include a phrase that de la Barra chose to omit in the second version of the exhibition in Mexico City, about the deaths of Stephens and Catherwood:

(, el clima tropical cobro su cota: en 1850, Stephens viajó a Panamá, para trabajar en el proyecto del ferrocarril Trans-Ístmico. Dos años después aún durante los trabajos de construcción del ferrocarril, Stephens enfermó gravemente de malaria, fue encontrado inconsciente debajo de una ceiba, (árbol considerado sagrado por los mayas) y tuvo que ser embarcado a Nueva York. Murió en su casa de LeRoy Place 13, Greenwich Village (que aun esta

*en pie), el 13 de Octubre de 1852. En cuanto a Catherwood, hallo la muerte en una travesía de Londres a Nueva York, al hundirse la embarcación 'S.S. Arctic' en 1854 (Leon de la Barra 2011, July 19)*²⁰³

The symbolic elements of these lines are heavy, laden with double meanings and mappings. The house in Greenwich Village on LeRoy Place, the ceiba tree, the sunken ship, the cost which the tropic climate exacted on the two Northern explorers - all speak the double language of symbols as indexes tied to the genre of the anthropological other. But why did the curator omit this data in the later version of the exhibition for a Mexico City audience? Could the presentation of details of their deaths in the exhibition text mirror the trope of the humoristic revenge narrative, like the popular euphemism “Montezuma’s revenge” used to describe the phenomenon of Northern tourists getting sick with diarrhoea when traveling in Mexico? Why does Barra include the address, neighbourhood of the house where Stephens died?

In a feminist reading of Stephens’s accounts of indigenous populations, Heather Abdelnur notes that the writers, all American or European, who documented Mayan communities of this time “did not markedly register [much] interest in allowing the appearance of women in their writings,” with the exception of William T. Brigham in the 1880s and John Lloyd Stephens in the 1830s, both of whom “each seems to have had an unusual interest in women, perhaps for conquest or lechery rather than pure observation.” (Abdelnur 2010). Indeed, the bestselling *Incidents of travel in Yucatan* (1843) includes detailed accounts of young women, the way their clothing fit them, and whether or not Stephens found them beautiful (and to what degree), he especially took joy in photographing beautiful young Mayan women, judging them by their levels of beauty (and ugliness), in one case negotiating with other men in selling the photographs of these women to other men, without the knowledge or consent of the young women (Stephens et

²⁰³ “However, the tropical climate took its toll: in 1850, Stephens traveled to Panama, to work on the Trans-Isthmian railroad project. Two years later, even during the construction of the railway, Stephens fell seriously ill with malaria. He was found unconscious under a ceiba, a tree considered sacred by the Maya, and had to be shipped to New York. He died at his home at LeRoy Place 13, Greenwich Village (still standing), on October 13, 1852. As for Catherwood, he found death on a voyage from London to New York, drowning when the vessel 'S.S. Arctic' sank in 1854.” (author’s translation).

al 1843, 105-6).

Out of the fifteen artists featured in the exhibition, five were either European or Euro-American (the largest group). Four of the artists were from Mexico (three from the Mexico City generation mentioned earlier – Mario García Torres, Milena Muzquiz, and Mariana Castillo Deball), one from Argentina, one from Peru and one of Puerto Rican decent. The remaining three were Guatemalan (two young contemporary artists, Rodrigo Fernández Cevallos and performance artist Naufus Ramírez-Figeroa, and one cannon artist, the renowned modernist Carlos Mérida, famous for being one of the first painters to fuse European modernist styles with Guatemalan and Mexican themes). Some of the artists, like Mariana Castillo Deball (b.1975) or even Cyprien Galliard, had already become internationally known for their investigations of anthropology, archaeology, ruins, and ethnography in their artistic practices. Many of them already had work shown in large institutions of the North, some of them de la Barra subsequently included in the Guggenheim's mapping project. In the second version of the exhibition, Barra expanded the artist list to include even more Mexico City artists who became famous in the 1990s and were related to the same generation, adding Stefan Brüggenmann (b.1975), and Gabriel Orozco (with Mauricio Maillé and Mauricio Rocha). Milena Muzquiz (b.1974) of Los Super Elegantes, and Mario García Torres, and are often identified in bios and art critique essays as part of a Mexico City generation of artists which I described earlier, who began showing in the mid 1990s. The male gaze was definitely present from the “old masters” to the 1960s Northern cannon to the new generations of contemporary artists: male perspectives and views constituted 67% of the exhibition, with ten men and only five participating women (all of whom were in newest category of contemporary artists).

The discreet geographical mapping of the exhibition follows a pattern: the artists (and even curator) study in one place (Europe, particularly its institutions), make work about another place (Latin America, particularly, its indigenous – Mayan – ruins). This is mirrored in the curator's formal education (he holds a PhD in History and Theories from the Architectural Association, London) and his popular art blog, a titled Centre for the

Aesthetic Revolution, an appropriation of Jacques Rancière's essay, "The Aesthetic Revolution and its outcomes", using as the tag-line motto for the blog an introductory line from the essay (León De La Barra 2011, July 19). The pattern is then mirrored again in a list Barra includes in a blog entry about the Incidents version of the show in Mexico, where he posts images which were "unfortunately not included" in the exhibition but which he sees as relevant: more 1800s photographs and etchings by European visitors to Latin America; an image by Ad Reinhardt, 'How to Look at Modern Art in America', PM magazine, June 2, 1946 (which the curator wanted "to be hung upside down, to be located near Piere Leguillon's posters and in front of Sam Durant's upside town tree"); Marcel Duchamp, 'Fresh Widow', 1920; Carlos Fuentes, 'Chac Mool', short story, 1973; Alexander Calder, 'Uxmal' gouache, 1975; Simon Martin, seated Olmec figure from the Sainsbury Collection and 'Untitled (after Sol Le Witt)', 2011; and several others which bear witness to a similar pattern of mapping between the cannon, Latin America and indigenous as a site for inspiration, and artworks by European and Latin American artworks (León De La Barra 2011, July 19).

Barra is also concerned with the space and time which audiences will read into the exhibition: he calls the contemporary works in his show the "new archaeology of the present," and describes them as existing "in the space created by the reflections, resonances and ruptures produced between their work and that of the travellers, artists, photographers and archaeologists who followed their [Stephens and Catherwood's] footsteps."

But what does this "new" archaeology of the present make visible and what does it hide? How is it different from the "old present" or past which we are presented with from images and texts from Catherwood, Stephens, and even Smithson?

Past representations of the indigenous were often defined by an anthropological voice (which imposed classifications and names often foreign to the indigenous) and by a silence or lack of voice from the indigenous (especially female indigenous, who were

often rendered invisible as well as voiceless, a point made by Abdelnur). This was coupled with an objectifying of their personhood by equating the indigenous with the flora and fauna or ruins of indigenous landscape, a trope, which can still be found today in many museums of natural history in the Northern/Western cities. Given this past, which is made visible and brought into the present by Barra's work around Stephens, Catherwood and Smithson, who could arguably fit the trope of "three dead white guys"²⁰⁴ -- why not include more indigenous voices in the contemporary artworks? There is only one artist included in the exhibition who politically identified as being of Mayan Quiche descent, the now deceased Carlos Mérida, also of Spanish and mestizo heritage. But where were the indigenous voices of the present? Instead of an overrepresentation of Europeans and Mexicans, why not include more locally based artists, even ones who have shown widely and have similar qualifications as the rest of the group? While Barra's choices might follow a popular formula for exhibitions of Latin American art, it seems a very strange move within the local context, to make an exhibition about interpretations of an indigenous past and present, without including any of the practicing Mayan artists from Guatemala City who have been gaining local and international acclaim in the contemporary arts scene, (like Ángel Poyón, for example). Even the introductory texts starts out by hinting at the theme of absence and silence around indigenous identity: "En el medio norteamericano de aquel entonces, la sola idea de una 'civilización' indígena era algo que no era aceptado fácilmente" (León De La Barra 2010, May 4) a theme it then goes on to mirror instead of address. The old (engravings, travel texts, 1960s land art works) is juxtaposed with the new (contemporary new genres artworks); the idea of the traveller and the foreigner juxtaposed, but missing native voices, viewpoints, theories and gazes.

It is also important to ask why the overrepresentation of artists who live and work in Europe? All but two studied art in Europe or North America (Berlin, Los Angeles, New

²⁰⁴ I use this vernacular phrase in quotes to signal that I am borrowing a speech meme from scholars and students in Black studies and Women's studies, used to critique the canon of European academics and thinkers, e.g., site 3rd text essay that uses this meme.

York, etc). Wu asked this same question in her study of geographic flows and representation of artists in Documenta, concluding that artistic flows are still moving from the peripheries to the centre, where much of the art world is still defined and marketed, and that there is value in examining the location, nationality and other demographic data of contemporary artists who biennialised and validated by the biennial system, even though, “It may seem odd, even retrograde, to think of contemporary art practice in terms of artists’ nationality and place of birth, at a time when there is so much talk of globalisation, hybridisation, trans-nationalisation, world markets and so on.” (Wu 2009, 1).

Contemporary artists often include photographs of themselves on their websites, as do many of those included in this exhibition, and their images often appear on artist bios in galleries and museums (like the Guggenheim’s mapping project blog). When looking at the images of the artists in this exhibition, it becomes clear, somewhat obvious, that a large majority (though not a totality) could easily pass for European, a continent where many of them studied art. But this is not true for the majority of practicing artists from Guatemala City – some of whom have garnered international attention in the 21st century (Regina José Galindo, Ángel Poyón, Aníbal López, to name a few). This is indeed a topic which remains taboo in the art world; seldom, if ever, mentioned. But I include it here to ask, what narratives about whiteness and European identity in Latin America are salient, visual representations of coloniality of power, within the visual narratives of curatorial discourse as a regional (or national) representation?

Identity Exhibitions

How are these curatorial narratives, key texts, and paradigm twists braided into a genealogy of large-scale exhibitions, creating an archive in which details are often lost to large narratives? One of the most visible and most funded “identity” exhibitions, *Inverted Utopias*, is an example of how a blockbuster exhibition changed the dominant narrative

on Latin American art from magical realism to a socially-engaged avant-garde. But other productions provided a multiplicity of narratives (even as large productions singularized the stories around the same works and authors). Texts like *Beyond the Fantastic* (1995), a series of essays by Latin American curators, art critics and historians made possible by funding from the Arts Council of England and London Arts Board, presented a variety of underrepresented critiques from Latin American contemporary perspectives, primarily challenging the use of the Western idea of modernity to judge art from Latin America. Nestor Garcia Canclini and Gerardo Mosquera articulated how art historians, critics, curators and even sociologists from the West had erred when analysing Latin America as a third world primitive state which could never be modern or postmodern. The primary concern of the book seemed to be the same as the earlier 1992 *Ante America* exhibition, also curated by Gerardo Mosquera: “para establecer un dialogo de sur a norte.”²⁰⁵

Exhibitions and texts like these, as well as others like these,²⁰⁶ have tried to tell the story of what Latin American contemporary art means, how and why it became part of the biennial circuit as a region-based genre. The earlier exhibitions of the late 1980s and early 90s tended to be most concerned with finding a set of common aesthetics, a look or set of qualities, trying to make visible the “place without a present” as Juan Davila described it. But some, like, *Ante America* (presented in Colombia), set out not to define Latin America but to build bridges between this present and the work of artists from the English speaking Caribbean as well as with Native American and African American artists. The curators hoped to broaden an image of American art by building on a Latin American understanding of ‘las Americas’ (a diverse place that spans continents, racial and cultural diversity) rather than a US understanding of the term ‘America’ (limited to one country).²⁰⁷ *The Hours*, shown first in Australia, chose to present a large amount of politically charged work from Latin America, selected from the private *Daros Latin*

²⁰⁵ A possible translation: “to establish a dialogue from South to North”

²⁰⁶ Like *The Hours: Visual Contemporary Art of Latin America* (2005) and *Ultrabaroque: Aspects of Post Latin American Art* (2007), to name a couple of many examples.

²⁰⁷ Another example, *The Experimental Exercise of Freedom* (2000) described a particular period in post-war Latin America through the work of five artists with European roots in Latin American countries with modernist art traditions.

America collection (housed in Zurich & Rio de Janeiro), although not engaging much with the often perceived aesthetic/political divide within the region.

Ultrabaroque, perhaps a little like Altermodern (2009), tried to find a present located beyond post-modernism, arguing that the concept of Latin American art is dead and a relic of the past, with the subtitle: “Aspects of Post Latin American Art.” Ultimately ‘ultrabaroque’ (a term the curators invented for the exhibition) turned out to be based on a not-so-believable claim, even the idea of the theme itself contradicted the idea of going post-identity by insisting that Latin American art had a common aesthetic. The curators argued that ultrabaroque is a distinctly kind of Latin American anthropophagy (a term used in Brazilian art theory to describe cultural cannibalism or the consumption of foreign influences) that is a result of colonial displacement. While seeking to represent the plurality of cultural references and hybridizations in artwork from Latin America, the show presented work from an elite group of Latin American artists educated in the US and Europe, who re-claim the baroque as a badge of honour that celebrates what Western/Northern art history might call bad taste or kitsch.

Yet as much as these shows tried to define, illustrate, and document the concept of art from Latin America, for the most part they did not (perhaps could not) capture the local histories, still largely un-recorded but arguably a driving force in the shaping of art produced in diverse contexts. In the first and only book on the history of women in performance art in Mexico (2004), Monica Mayer describes this problem that plagues historical survey exhibitions as a lack of visibility and documentation.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁸ “*Aquí cuento lo que he vivido y lo que he visto. Es un relato en primera persona. No podía ser de otra forma por varias razones, entre ellas, a que casi no hay documentos sobre los que me pudiera basar con un mayor distanciamiento. Ese material simple y sencillamente no existe. Las principales fuentes de información son la memoria, las conversaciones íntimas, el haber sido testigo de los hechos y, los documentos que nosotras mismas generamos.*” (Mayer 2004, 6). “Here I will relate what I have lived and what I have seen. It is a story in the first person. It could not be told any other way for several reasons, among them, that there are almost no documents [to tell this history] from another perspective of greater distance. That material simply does not exist. The main sources of information are memory, intimate conversations, having witnessed the facts and documents we generated ourselves.” (author’s translation).

Mayer's position as both protagonist and biographer of this history is one unique to the artist/historian or artist/curator dichotomies often set up in the biennial *rosca*.

Understanding the complex way that local and pan-ethnic histories interact is perhaps something lost on those who have not witnessed the process of trying to record a history which is constantly eclipsed (and sometimes erased) by other, better-funded, more institutional versions of art history. More funded editions on the subject are two English-language texts aimed at recounting Latino histories for British and American audiences: in *Corpus Delecti: Performance Art of the Americas*, (1998) artist/curator Coco Fusco begins to chronologise a history of performance in the Americas and *El Museo del Barrio's Arte ≠ Vida or Arte No Es Vida: Actions by Artists of the Americas, 1960-2000* (2008), focused largely on the political nature of performance, and contextualised this history with many references to European and US art and events.

In the first decade of the 2000s, a new kind of Latin American exhibition emerged, one built around the concept of a city show. This included shows which presented native artists living and making work in a particular city, such as *Mexico City: An Exhibition about the Exchange Rates of Bodies and Values* (2002). There were also city shows about foreign artists presenting their work in a particular Latin American context, such as British artists making and showing their work in Mexico City as a part of *Sodio y asfalto: arte británico contemporáneo en México*. A third category presented a platform for both native and foreign artists to interact with a city through site specific works, such as the *InSite* series on the Tijuana/San Diego Border, and *MultipleCity* in Panama City. While some of these shows replicated the idea of looking for a defining Latin American trait in all art from the region, and others simply provided a new cultural exchange, projects like *MultipleCity* experimented with concepts of insider/outsider status, local/international issues and pan-ethnic collaborations. The requirements for the exhibition were that "artworks had to respond to some physical, social and cultural aspect of the city... artists were asked to actively relate to the city and struggle with its myriad seductions and pressing problems; and moreover to ensure that both the process of creation and final works (without necessarily being interactive) would involve their host communities and

have some sort of impact upon them” (Samos and Gerardo Mosquera 2004) This added a new dimension of engagement to the social-interaction model used sometimes in biennials (ibid). As Craig Garrett described in ArtNexus, the rhetoric behind the show took a vastly different stance on the importance of art in Latin America:

Timed to coincide with the nation's centennial, MultipleCity presented a radical new vision of art as social praxis. The exhibition featured fourteen local and international artists, all of whom tailored new works to the physical and cultural realities of Panama City. And while the local responses were sometimes perplexed, they were for the most part overwhelmingly positive. (ibid)

A local response of “sometimes perplexed” but “overwhelmingly positive” is a response most biennials can only dream of, as local responses in the diverse cities of Latin America are often socially and politically critically responded too, with a range of reactions from anti-establishment to scandalous, as the “graffiti incident” in the 2008 São Paulo Biennial Biennial.²⁰⁹ But returning again to 2010, shortly after Barra’s presentation of the first version of Incidents, and while he was preparing the second version in Mexico City, Guatemala City-based curator Rosina Cazali wrote a piece reflecting upon the significance of Barra’s curatorial “resistance”. In the December 2011 issue of the Colombian visual art journal *Errata*, Cazali wrote, with a ‘personal is political’ kind of tone:

Vivo y trabajo en Guatemala. Desde hace 25 años soy curadora independiente en un país donde demarcarse como tal siempre resulta una contradicción, porque no hay figuras institucionales de las cuales independizarse, tomar distancia y reivindicarse como persona autónoma. Para mí esto ha sido, más bien, un proceso solitario cuya única certeza es su propio eco; es decir, la incerteza del acto de gritar en el vacío y cómo este, a la vez, persiste como una perversa forma de hacer ejercicios de fortalecimiento y resistencia. Tal vez por eso es que mueve tanto un texto como el del «Novo museo tropical» y su apuesta por repensar qué queremos decir cuando hablamos de arte contemporáneo desde lugares con escasos recursos, donde la contemporaneidad adquiere matices extras y se establece como una relación singular con el propio tiempo. Se trata de repensar de manera rigurosa la noción de museo en una sociedad que no reconoce ningún proyecto de nación ni precisamente por eso su utilidad. (Cazali 2011)²¹⁰

²⁰⁹ For more information, see blog accounts like this one of the incident:

<http://delindacollier.wordpress.com/2013/07/07/my-student-just-presented-on-the-28th-bienal/>

²¹⁰ “I live and work in Guatemala. For 25 years I have been an independent curator in a country where to declare oneself as such is always a contradiction, because there are no institutional figures from which to become independent, from which to distance one's position and claim individuality. For me this has been, rather, a solitary process whose only certainty is its own echo; That is to say, the uncertainty of the act of

Cazali succinctly presents the problem of curating contemporary art in the periphery, also seen by others, like Akram Zaatari, as a benefit because of its lack of reliance on the state, its precarious position that is a space where artists have created their own infrastructures, always at risk of being appropriated, romanticised or even imitated by the biennial rosca's centre. Cazali was writing about her reaction upon reading Barra's manifesto for a possible museum, Novo Museo Tropical, and his blog, Centre for the Aesthetic Revolution. "*Como recibir una bocanada de aire fresco*,"²¹¹ she writes, she perceives Barra's curatorial actions as small, micropolitical acts which disagree with the absence of Latin American artists in the art world centre's cannon, and seeks to right this wrong. Indeed, this is a curatorial stance which quite accurately sums up Barra's positioning as a curator from elsewhere who works in the centre, as it does many other curators based in Latin America who are concerned as well, with entering the center (Virgina Perez Ratton and Cuauhtémoc Medina, to name a couple). The Novo Museo Tropical is a proposal which Barra has presented at conferences and art fairs, and in a the form of an exhibition at the 2012 Teorética conference in Costa Rica. The manifesto on the exhibition poster reads as such:

Novo Museo Tropical (Museu without walls)

when museums and cultural centres outside of the hegemonic centres remain empty because they don't have budget for a programme or curators...

when artists living in the semiperipheries produce specifically for the international market, art fairs and biennales, while ignoring their local public and contexts, or while abusing of their local public and context...²¹²

shouting into the void and how this, at the same time, persists as a perverse way of doing exercises of strengthening and resistance. Perhaps that is why a text like that of the "New Tropical Museum" is so deeply moving with its commitment to rethink what we mean when we talk about contemporary art from places with scarce resources, where contemporaneity takes on extra nuances and is established as a singular relationship with time. It is a matter of rigorously rethinking the notion of a museum in a society that does not recognize any project of a nation, and it's usefulness is precisely because of this." (author's translation).

²¹¹ "Like receiving a breath of fresh air." (author's translation)

²¹² The text continues: "when art produced elsewhere is bought legally (without looting as in the past) by international patrons and museums... shouldn't we rethink the kind of 'art' we do? shouldn't we rethink the kind of exhibitions we produce? shouldn't we rethink the kind of museums we aspire to have? Novo Museo Tropical, a museum without walls... an invitation to rethink the museum outside the centre... do we need new museums and mausoleums? can we think a different kind of collection? do we need art bought in



Image 3.1g. Poster for the Novo Museo Tropical exhibition at Teorética in Costa Rica 2012, image from Errata Magazine.

Barra uses the phallic symbol of the banana to stand in for several meanings: the multitudes of unnamed/unrecognized artists, the tropics, and even perhaps, the commodification of Latin America through North American capitalism. The banana is after all used famously by Gabriel García Márquez in his classic masterpiece, *100 Years of Solitude*, to symbolise the entrance of US capitalism into Latin America, and the political, social and economic disaster it claimed on local communities. Cazali compares Barra's poster of the banana cluster to a poster of a conceptual map from 1936 by Alfred Barr, *Cubism and Abstract Art*.

galleries, biennales and art fairs? how to protect the collection from the climate without resorting to air condition? can we think a museum that exists beyond the conventions of the XX century contemporary art world and its structures? how can cultural production and memory survive humanity after humans disappear from the earth? novo museo tropical... soon somewhere near you... Projeto Museutropical somewhere without walls..." (ibid)

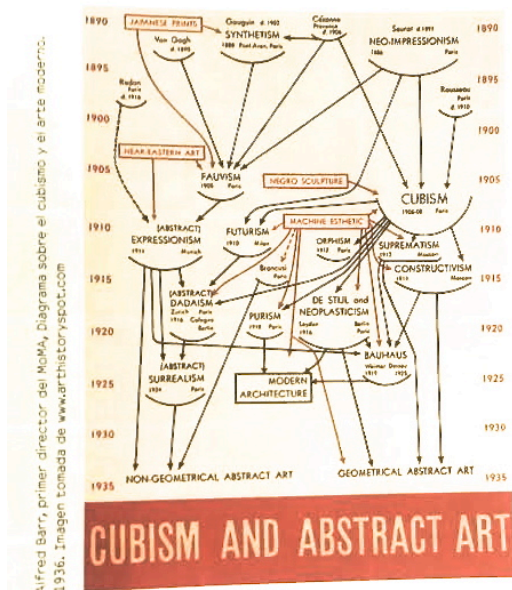


Image 3.1h. Poster of 1936 conceptual map by Alfred Barr, Cubism and Abstract Art, image from Errata magazine.

She suggests that Barra's Novo Museo applies the strategy Joaquín Torres García used in his upside-down map to Barr's Euro-centric map representing a canon. She summarises this strategy as taking advantage of the "fissures" in hegemonic systems, with the end goal of creating a broader field of understanding the singularities of the local, to better understand how artworks from very specific local contexts have been made to be seen as universal in part of the discourses of the centre (Cazali 2011, 106). Comparing these actions to the concept of minor literature, or minor expressions, indeed these actions seem to fit part of the definition, especially with Cazali's reading of the micro-political, and their undoubtedly marginal position. Yet how can they be classified as revolutionary, as deterritorialising, if they fit neatly into the binaries of West-centric curatorial discourse, or even more poignantly, into the colonality of power?

And what about work that is not concerned with entering into the centre, being seen/validated by Europe, North America and its urban centres? That exists for a moment outside the paradigms reinforced by Cazali and Barra? Are there other curatorial veins and artistic proposals from the region that, like Barra suggests the Novo Museo might,

exist “beyond the conventions of the XX century” but without the contradiction of a curatorial gesture obviously concerned with the marketing and commodification of Latin American art? Or alternatively, could some of the same art curated by well-known regional curators like Barra and Cazali be understood through other curatorial narratives?

Consider the example of the theme of political disappearances, a curatorial theme stemming from a wide body of artistic practice that has been presented in the quasi-biennial format and incorporated into city exhibitions by Latin American and Northern curators. Taking its theme from the everyday, exhibitions like ‘The Disappeared’ highlight a problem that is in fact universal, rather than focusing on the lack of entry into the canon or a lack of curatorial funding which so greatly concern Barra and Cazali. Comprised of some 15 pieces of art from Latin America and curated by American Laurel Reuter, *The Disappeared* toured for three years in Latin America and the United States (2006-2010), with images depicting an absence of those who have died: empty bicycles, bones, erased faces, and ID style photographs from expired licenses of past eras. Encapsulated in the cultural memory of artists are remnants, although not complete bodies, of the disappeared. “Through their art, these artists fight amnesia in their own countries as a stay against such atrocities happening again,” read the introductory exhibition text (Reuter and Weschler 2006). Ironically, it was shown during a time when people continued to disappear at the hands of state and systemic violence, and a time of US militarization in Afghanistan and Iraq. On September 17, 2006, during the first month of the exhibition’s presentation in Buenos Aires, Julio Lopez disappeared, one day before he was scheduled to testify as key witness in the genocide trial of ex-chief of police, Miguel Etchecolatz. “Where is Julio López?” demonstrators chanted in mass demonstrations.

For Latin American and US audiences *The Disappeared* provided a way to reflect on public terror in the past and present, as they were also experiencing a US media version of the story on public terror. Arturo Duclos’s version of the Chilean flag made out of human femurs instead of cloth and thread questioned patriotism; Doris Salcedo has given

new meaning to discarded everyday objects, using empty chairs to speak about patriotism and the masses in Colombia. Her used, empty chairs of various sizes and colours stand in the gore of violence in her ‘mass grave’ created by installing a clutter of chairs on the outside of a building for the 2003 8th Istanbul Biennial, and as an homage to Colombians killed outside the Palace of Justice in Bogotá, where she lowered 280 chairs during the course of two days for an installation in 2002. Oscar Muñoz's Project for Memorial (2005) can be read as what curator, psychoanalyst and cultural critic Suely Rolnik calls “provok[ing] an immersion in the sensations lived within the experiences they enabled” (Bang Larsen and Rolnik 2007, 32). Muñoz’ metal plate etchings of faces from ID style portraits, which appear only as the viewer stands close enough to the work to breathe onto the plates (and which begin to disappear almost as soon as the warm air evaporates), provoke a variety of images about terror for the viewers, by making them a catalyst, or active participant, in the appearing and disappearing of the faces. Rolnik pondered, “How is one to convey a work that is not visible, as much as it is only produced in the sense-based experience of each viewer?” (Bang Larsen and Rolnik 2007, 31). Ironically, these invisible sensory experiences became the essence of some of the most viewed artworks of this period, when, after multiple appearances in exhibitions and galleries, they came to define an era of Latin American art in the 2000s exhibitions.²¹³

Argentinean arts writer Ana Longoni describes this image of an immense absence in the present, a by-product of dictatorships and military rule in the Americas. She writes, “*El desaparecido, arrancado violentamente de la calle, del aula, de la fabrica, de su casa, y arrojado a un vacío del que nunca volvió, es aquel del que no se conoce cuerpo ni*

²¹³ In another 21st century iconic Latin American artwork that bears mentioning here, Cildo Miereles’ Red Shift (1967-84), Rolnik reads the memory of loss. She describes the trauma and normalized violence from military oppression by the state in Brazil as something that had become so ubiquitous in the consciousness of the 1970s public that it was part of the cultural psyche (Rolnik 2009). Her theoretical work about the trauma of the dictatorship in what she calls, “the resonant body of the artist” is based upon her exploration of Brazilian artist Lygia Clark’s work. She describes a body (belonging to the artist) which consciously or subconsciously absorbs the dynamics and ideals (of the violent context?) that seem to hum around the body, like the invisible waves of static on the radio.

historia desde ese momento.” (Longoni 2007, 23).²¹⁴ This absence is also memorialized in the witness, in which case the absent becomes visible once again “*el [sobreviviente] se condensa no solo la memoria del terror sino tambien la narracion del yo politico, del militante, activista, guerrillero, combatiente apresado, torturado, caido pero no asesinado.*” (Longoni 2007, 23)²¹⁵ The memorialized victim is inscribed inside the survivor’s identity.

Palestinian post-colonial theorist Edward Said spoke of a similar emptiness in the cultural panorama of the US, but instead of an absence of bodies, he describes missing knowledge, or knowledge that was prohibited, erased even from a US collective imagination through the project of an anti-Arab culture. In the wake of hate crimes against Arab Americans during the first few months after 9-11, Said pointed to the lack of knowledge about this culture that fuelled the violence. It was a knowledge prohibited to the general American public, which played into the explanation of war and identification of Islam as anti-American:

There is no massive literature, no fund of popular knowledge, no mobilizable discursive means to bring in as an antidote to writings about the Arab.... [no] ready examples at hand for circulation that specify positive contributions of the Arabs to science, to world literature, to even so modest a thing as popular wisdom. (Gabriel 2002)²¹⁶

In the public sphere, these gaps in knowledge facilitate ignorance and misunderstanding. Perhaps a way to understand and deal with the disappearances (or loss) of both citizens and knowledge is through the multiple voices of art. Artists have already picked up on these issues in a dialogue with the public – whether on city streets or inside galleries and

²¹⁴ “The disappeared person, violently torn from the street, the classroom, the factory, his house, and thrown into an emptiness from which he never returned, is one from whom no body or history has been known since.” (author’s translation)

²¹⁵ “The [survivor] condenses not only the memory of terror but also the narration of the political self, the militant, activist, guerrilla, the captured fighter who is tortured and fallen but not killed.” (author’s translation)

²¹⁶ Said continues, “These may exist in libraries, but the images, the values, and the knowledge they represent don’t circulate. There’s a prohibition against narrating the Arab story, as it were, which in the U.S. has been equated – not with a complex history of an entire people, but only with being opposed to Israel. That’s what the Arabs, in the end, are mostly known for.” (ibid).

exhibition halls. But as Said writes of Arab literature and cultural contributions, these narratives by artists often do not reach mainstream audiences, and do not become a part of the mainstream collective imagination. Other themes like this can be found in curatorial and artistic responses to state-sponsored violence, as with the case of MultipleCity, another example to consider when examining the value of a quasi-biennial kind of exhibition that cannot be fully explained by the curatorial system created to produce Latin American art as product.

Panamanian artist Brooke Alfaro presented *Nueve*²¹⁷ in the 2003 public art intervention with Panama City, called MultipleCity, to address issues of public space and the gang phenomenon. Utilizing the language of gangs and popular culture in a working class neighbourhood in Panama City, Brooke Alfaro's *Nueve*, (2003) featured a projection of two parallel videos on local buildings. The video piece was shown as a part of MultipleCity, curated by Adrienne Samos and Gerardo Mosquera and presented in public street spaces of Panama City. Alfaro filmed rival gangs in separate videos, singing the words to the same popular song, projecting these simultaneously on the outside of two buildings, which stood side-by-side within the neighbourhood of the gangs. The videos concluding as each gang turned to face the other, to throw/catch a soccer ball tossed from one screen to the other. The projection was met by cheering and excitement from hundreds of local residents who watched from neighbourhood streets below (Garrett 2003). Later the video was presented in the context of the Singapore and Venice Biennales of 2006 and 2003, respectively. *Nueve* bridges a gap between work meant for an art world audience and work meant for a working class popular public, a sector of the public which Gerardo Mosquera calls the art world's "abandoned public." (Mosquera 1995).

Examining these stories and messages against the backdrop of concurrent political events might help in moving towards a pluralistic world view, a 'pluriverse' (Dussel 2009, 516) as Dussel calls it, in which political languages and philosophies from different

²¹⁷ In English: Nine.

parts of the world meet to re-conceive the whole idea of post-modern politics (Buck-Morss 2003, 5). It seems the opposite of derisive curatorial narratives that would focus on pitting an essentialism of a regional aesthetic against another, or seek validation for a national art through entry into a system that will always necessarily objectify art and artists from the South.

In similar ways, yet at the same time with very different consequences and expressions, the public imaginary that surrounds artists making work in the Middle East and North Africa has been affected by political violence in a post 9-11 global age. First, it was an excuse for mass media to create a über-terrorist image of Arabs in the news, an image which had been used as a media stereotype since at least the 1980s, heightened by the American Bush administration which worked to create the illusion that so-called terrorists from the Arab world were the public enemy number one. But this stereotypical image was then forced to change in 2010 with the advent of the Arab Spring, when mass media was obliged to show many different expression of Arab citizens (albeit still operating from the base of stereotypical types, now they were forced into a plurality of images rather than the singling out of one image which had previously dominated news about the region throughout many decades). Circling back to the exhibition Told/Untold/Retold, it is significant to note that this exhibition, marking the inauguration of Mathaf, the Arab Museum of Modern Art, occurred during the same year as the Arab Spring. Just as the media was presenting a larger number of Arab faces and profiles in the news, Mathaf also presented to the artworld the idea of an Arab contemporary artist, with curatorial statements from curators Till Fellrath and Sam Bardaouil that hoped to prove they were presenting a curatorial narrative about this figure which differed from the biennial rosca imaginings of Arab contemporary art.

Fellrath based his curatorial narrative on the idea that this image had been “distorted” and the identity of the genre of Arab contemporary art “stolen” by three factors: the global political climate, the stereotyping of Arabs in the mass media, the process of commodifying contemporary art, and the predominance of the biennial rosca, or in his

words, “Western institutional practice”. He criticises these forces for combining to highlight three Western preoccupations that originally stem from Orientalism: the cliché of the veil and veiled woman, the idea that artists in the Arab world necessarily face artistic censorship and other cultural limitations. The MoMA’s “Without Boundary: Seventeen Ways of Looking (2006), suggests that all artists from the Middle East have to deal with boundaries and restrictions like censorship. Fellrath also mentions The Saatchi Gallery’s *Unveiled: New Art from the Middle East* (2009) and the publication *Veil: Veiling, Representation, and Contemporary Art* (2003), among other exhibitions and publications. All of these, he says “explicitly seek to reject and revert persistent stereotypes, yet one wonders if such titles end up achieving the exact opposite.” The same question could be asked of *Told/Untold/Retold*, as was brought up in some of the exhibition reviews. In geographically defined contemporary art shows on Arab art, viewers have been conditioned to expect “a use of calligraphy, portrayals of veiled woman, and references to Islam” (perhaps in the same way viewers were conditioned to expect all art from the region to be colourful, craft-like and primitive art with folkloric or indigenous qualities). Fellrath counters that the artists in this exhibition defy these stereotypes, describing them as a transnational crew who were given free range to submit any kind of work they chose, each piece commissioned specifically for the exhibition. He describes some of the demographics of the participating artists:

Another misconception in the West is the confusion of Arabs and the “Middle East,” which disregards the enormous cultural differences in the region. There’s an underlying tendency to unify artists with Arab origins irrespective of where they live and work. Artist [sic] that were born in the Arab world and continue to live and work there, will probably draw from different inspirations than those that have been living in the diaspora. Out of the twenty-three artists represented in the exhibition, more than half have been living in the West. (Fellrath 2014).

Like Barra, Fellrath traces an implicit map between the Arab world and the West, when he proudly explains the life and work trajectories of the participating artists²¹⁸ (in similar

²¹⁸ Fellrath goes on to list all of the artists categorized as “Middle Eastern” in his exhibition who have roots in other parts of the world, revealing another example of a phenomenon Wu has demonstrated is common to exhibitions of so-called ‘Non-Western’ art (a large part is still made by artists living, studying and growing up in the West): “Three artists, Abdelkader Benchemma, Kader Attia, and Zineb Sedira, were born in France as second-generation immigrants. A group of artists is working in New York, comprising Ghada

fashion to the ways his own credentials as curator and professor are displayed on his website). However, the exhibition does not mention that many of these same artists featured in Told/Untold/Retold were also participants in the exhibitions he criticizes, as well as other large recent biennials I have discussed in this chapter, such as Documenta 13 and the Venice Biennale. The work especially commissioned for Told/Untold/Retold is similar, in some cases identical, to artworks the same artists exhibited around Europe and the US around the same time period. Walid Raad's piece is actually part of a series by the same name which he began in 2007 and exhibited at the Whitechapel Gallery, Documenta 13, and other institutional spaces around Europe. Aspects of some of the artists' work that could be considered more risqué are absent from the work submitted for the Told/Untold/Retold exhibition – even when these aspects have come to be part of the artist's signature work as it has appeared in other galleries and institutions. There is no mention Fellrath or Bardaouil's introductory essays of the queer or homoerotic male figure central to Akram Zaatari's practice, although they do write about other aspects of his work. The piece he submitted focuses on the processes of archiving photographs, and does not feature centrally any of the other male figures so common in his work.

Bardaouil insists that his exhibition presents a counter-narrative to the presentation of contemporary Arab artists from a Western perspective, and that this is not a show based upon the geographic turn in contemporary art.²¹⁹ Instead of focusing the show on geography and its "naïve identitarian discourse," Bardaouil proposes that the exhibition is centred around time and artists use of it as "the only true universal form" and "the last frontier that today's artists can claim as their own." This re-reading is central to

Amer, Wafaa Bilal, Ahmed Al-Soudani, and Walid Raad. Youssef Nabil splits his time primarily between Paris and New York, Khaled Takreti and Mounir Fatmi live in Paris, Adel Abidin in Helsinki, Sadik Kwaish Alfraji in the Netherlands, Steve Sabella and Zineb Sedira in London. Jeffar Khaldi studied in Texas before setting up his studio in Dubai." (Fellrath 2014).

²¹⁹ In the introductory essay, he writes: "'Told/Untold/Retold' is a response to an exigent disparity in critical discourse evident in the putative designation of form as subaltern to content and the posturing of the referent and iconological as the cardinal gateway for all understanding. This seems to be a curatorial paradigm that is particularly adopted in the atomization of artists who come from traditionally non-Western origins. Mindful of such practices, yet far from expiatory rhetoric of post-colonial studies, this exhibition aims at directing the viewer's gaze towards the formalistic qualities of the works at hand." (Bardaouil and Fellrath 2014)

Bardaouil's curatorial standpoint, though the actual exhibition in white and black cubes, seemed to follow a much more traditional curatorial logic. Without the curatorial statements, much of the Told/Untold/Retold looks very much like the big exhibitions in London or New York on the same subject. In a review of the exhibition, Clare Davies suggests "the arc of an argument and the consistency of Bardaouil and Fellrath's own curatorial vision for Told/Untold/Retold remain illegible." (2011). Is it a case of shuffling the same deck of cards to present a similar suit of artworks and faces? Perhaps in many ways like Incidents, the repetition of the trace in this exhibition overshadows all other attempts to present alternative narratives within the space of contemporary art.

Is writing about, thinking about even speaking about Arab contemporary art in the 21st century (and speaking about it in English), a minor expression, a necessarily politicised project of translation and territories? "Some artists in different Arab cities are starting to ask themselves this question:" wrote Tony Chakar in 2005, "Could art find its vital role as an investigator of these uncharted territories of difference?" (Chakar 2005, 46).

Buzzwords like Orientalism, terror and the veil haunt both media reports and art exhibitions on the Middle East, and when presented outside this region, are almost always cast in the light of the dangerous, the forbidden, and the mysterious. Inside the region, debates on pan-Arab identity and communication are concerned with a different set of issues, including mis-representations, politicised states, reconstruction, intertwined religion and culture, and Europe as other. Yet the communities within this region do not always see themselves as part of a unified continent or even culture, in this place of contested boundaries. In the Middle East, North African and Arab diaspora, however, just the opposite might be true. Outside the region, pan-ethnic links become more visible and often more important, especially when mobilising in the art world. That is to say, while an artist who is atheist and from Tehran may not consider herself to be Arab, or Muslim, she may identify with those who are, when building a network of artists in the diaspora (e.g. New York City, London or perhaps Berlin).

The importance of an Arab diaspora (creating work while living in Europe and the US) is apparent in recent Middle Eastern identity exhibitions, especially in discussions about artistic production and place. The majority of historians, artists and cultural critics publishing and showing work from these regions are those who have experience in both the Middle East and a European or North American country. Not unlike the current Latin American art “authorities,” the majority are also educated in the West. Artists Tony Chakar and Jayce Salloum, whom have published widely in English, warn against the possibility of the erasure of local identities implied in the creation of a project of an Arab world or Arab aesthetic in art. Terms like “Middle Eastern art” or “Arab experimental film” are as contrived as the concept of Latin America.

A 2009 symposium at the Tate Britain titled Contemporary Art in the Middle East presented some of the most pertinent issues in the field, from an obviously diasporic position. Involving artists and curators who work transnationally, it was divided into discussions on five themes: 1) defining the Middle East 2) writing and translation 3) art now- recent exhibitions 4) tradition and modernity and 5) the politics of space. The concept of space becomes a necessary identity marker when the majority of artists from this region are making art and showing it outside of the region. Inversely, the majority of their art is being bought by Middle Eastern collectors and kept in the Middle East. This makes for an interesting metaphor on transnational art. The works themselves become symbolic migrants, shipped back to the homeland from the diaspora.

Tradition is an equally important issue, a defining feature that sometimes borders on historical truism. The British Museum’s collection of contemporary art from the Middle East, one of the largest collections of its kind in Europe, only acquires work that expresses a link to an Islamic or ancient past (perhaps nicely complementing others of its collections of Islamic art and ancient art). But how can such a curatorial decision mark the recording of this history of contemporary Middle Eastern art)? Does it create or impose a theme upon artists from this region, by focusing solely on work from a certain theme? Does it support a theme already significant to artists working within the region?

As the collection is housed in the diaspora, what effect does it have on the memorialisation of nostalgia and links to the past or links to a homeland?

Along with an increase of exhibitions on Middle Eastern contemporary art, there have been a rising number of voices calling for more critiques of Western art and the canon from Arab, Muslim and Middle Eastern perspectives. Architecture historian Zeynep Çelik asserts that perspectives from these regions can be especially relevant in a re-reading of the canon, in her essay *Colonialism, Orientalism and the Canon* (Çelik 2000). Like other arguments on the cultural relevance of Latin American critics to the world, Celik posits that examples from the Middle East should be used to comment on the Western canon and art world, instead of always the other way around. This must be especially true if the concept of the global art world is to be given any authentic meaning. Recent projects like Abdelkebir Khatibi's discussion of Freudian logic and Islam (Khatibi 2009, 689), or Inas Alkholy's re-reading of European renaissance art in the context of current politics in the Middle East (Alkholy 439-447), offer readings of Western art and culture through Middle Eastern perspectives. Victor Tupitsyn's *Note on Globalisation: The Work of Art in the Age of Shoe-throwing* (Tupitsyn 2009, 515) describes a whole era with a metaphoric action between an Iraqi reporter and American president which occurred in 2008 Baghdad. Instead of using 9/11 as the identity marker of an era, Tupitsyn uses an event that took place in the Gulf but was witnessed around the world through blogging and other global media. Tupitsyn's use of this event as an identity marker could also be read as another example of using a Middle Eastern perspective (in this case the cultural significance of throwing ones shows) to explain a phenomenon from the West (the oil war and the Bush dynasty). A deeper look into the politics of art and culture in these regions highlights many other ways that listening to these perspectives from Arab regions can bring new meaning both to global and Western issues.

While the concept of Arab (or even Middle Eastern) contemporary art was a term arguably defined in the West, European curators still have a difficult time deciding just exactly where it is located. Edward Said used Western artworks about Arab culture as

the crux of his argument against the Western domination of Palestine and other Arab nations back in 1979 (Said 1979). The art he described and the culture he critiqued in 'Orientalism,' was the West, and not the Middle East, as he has specified. Yet few cultural theorists (Western or non-Western) have picked up where Said left off, in an effort to re-define a theory about art from this region. More recently, contemporary artists from the region represent some of the clearest voices on this issue. Perhaps as a part of this effort, a new project to document and comment upon both local and regional specificity, they have taken up the role of archiving and defining their own work. Curatorial projects like Kamal Boullata's Palestinian Art from 1850 to the Present (Boullata 2009) and Jayce Salloum's participation in the World Wide Video 2002 Festival in Amsterdam (Salloum 2005, 27-31) are two examples. For some, the artwork became an icon representing the exploration of grey area between fabrication and fact from an Arab perspective, or between local realities and false claims perpetuated by the media. For others, artwork like that of Walid Raad, which is often interpreted as related to this theme, has already become an over-used trope to which all contemporary artists from Arab countries are compared to by Western curators.

What is the danger or problematics in grouping an artist like Walid Raad with Shirin Neshat, or Susan Hefuna? Questions of which countries, languages, borders, religions, and which heritages are persistent. Should art from this region be classified as Arab art, Gulf art, Middle Eastern art, North African art, Islamic art? Can this be a group at all if artists speak different languages, come from different religious backgrounds, and express different diasporic experiences in their artistic production? The most common term used in English publications since 2000 was art from the Middle East, until the second decade of the 21st century when the term Arab became more used.

In trying to describe 'new Arab video' Jayce Salloum explains this debate, including his doubts on the possibility of a pan-Arab art identity.

We live on variations of the same turf yet we are divided. Developing a pan-regional discourse of 'new Arab video' may be neither possible nor wished for. The failure of Pan-Arabism haunts us,

as does the fear of authoritative monoliths, all too menacingly present. Local discourses are possible and do exist, there is a connective tissue of sorts formed/forming, fragile, prone to external and internal pressures and subject to dissolution at any moment. (Salloum 2005, 29)

As Salloum asserts, a pan-Arab art identity may not be something welcomed by artists working locally, nonetheless, it has become a reoccurring theme presented outside of the region in large contemporary art exhibitions. Perhaps this is due to a lack of authentic information about art histories from this region or a purposeful erasure of this information on the part dominant US/Euro hegemony, as Edward Said theorised in the post 9-11 intellectual aftermath. Detailed information on this cultural history from this region is still unknown to outsiders. The issue of language barriers among different versions of Arabic spoken North Africa, Egypt and the Gulf, for example is another example of obstacles to unity. Even within each region, a range of different sounds and local dialects distinguish the Arabic spoken in each country.

Promoters of Pan-Arabist movement, such as Egyptian May Oueida Abd al-Nâsir, who is credited with creating the concept behind a kind of Arab socialism, creatively addressed this issue when Pan-Arabism reached its height in the 1960s. In some of his speeches he “adopted a theme of successfully bridging the different sounds of Egyptian, Syrian, and Iraqi Arabic, and rose to a classical Arabic without losing or boring his audience” (Yaqub 2004).

While Pan-Arabism and Arab Nationalism, both political projects which originated in the Arabic speaking world, reached their height in the 1960s, they are now remnants of the past. Many artists, like Salloum and Chakar, are aware of the failure of these projects, and are wary of replicating a similar format with the phenomenon currently known in the West as Middle Eastern contemporary art. Unlike Latin America, the project of Pan-Arabism was not accompanied by national curriculum, public art projects, or development of an academic intellectual field. Although Pan-Arabism was commented on by artists from variety of disciplines, there was not a specific movement within art theory or criticism which formed a field out of addressing these themes. In contrast, after

the open call art historian Marta Traba in the 1960s, Latin American historians and critics stepped up to publish and theorise in reaction to Western theories about their arts, albeit blind to many of the social conditions of art-making in the region.

Even if Edward Said's critique of Orientalism can be compared to Colombian art historian Marta Traba's 1960s call to action for historians to approach Latin American art from a larger perspective (i.e. not just a Western one), there was no movement which ensued to create a variety of pluralistic critique of art from the region (as was the case in Latin America). There were however, similar sentiments of pan-nationalistic yearning in Arab nationalist movements, and a search to turn shared characteristics into a shared identity, although many considered the movement to have failed (even as artists from Cairo, Beirut, and other Arab cities feel 'straight-jacketed' into an Arab identity proposed in open calls for survey exhibitions hoping to present a definitive answer to the Western art world's misunderstanding of the region).

Arab nationalism was created out of a response to a definition of Arab society from Christian Arab thinkers in the early 1900s who sought a non-religious definition for Arab culture and traditions. Arabism came to represent a perspective in opposition or as an alternative to European thought and dominance (Sharabi 1970, 134). In Franz Fanon's words, it is a strategy "to assume an Arab or African culture in the face of the global condemnation effected by the dominant power." (Fanon 2007, 204). Arabism is not so much a natural lived experience but an attitude adopted with a plan for strategic resistance.

Visual artist Tony Chakar describes the paradoxes implied in the concept of a pan-ethnic Arab category, one that implicates the problem of a unifying voice and a diverse set of issues:

The Arab world, the Orient, the Levant, the Middle East or the more recent Islamic World are all terms that seem to be leading a life of their own in political and/or ideological discourses. This

life is in sharp contradiction with a lived experience that increasingly negates these concepts, and yet they do not subside. (Chakar 2007)²²⁰

In Cairo, 2008, Nida Ghouse describes how another appearance of the concept “Middle Eastern art” particularly bothers artists working from within the region (Ghouse 2010). She writes of local artist discussions spurred by the arrival of international open calls for Arab artwork to be shown to foreign audiences. She describes local artist frustration with “the claustrophobia of catchall categories such as “Arab” and “Islamic” art. Raed Yassin tested out this experience by facetiously labelling himself as a “war artist,” when submitting work to international venues. The work exaggerated stereotypes about artistic production in Beirut, but to his surprise was both taken for truth and given gallery representation. At the same time he found difficulty showing his other works which were not about war. Ghouse describes this phenomenon as a narrowing of avenues available for artistic expression, as artists often feel “straight jacketed into identities they didn’t always care for, much less ask for.” Large survey exhibitions, hoping to become authoritative examples on the unclearly defined topic of “Middle Eastern Contemporary Art” function in what Ghouse calls “the museumisation of that region.” (ibid). These two different concepts of pan-ethnic identity in the region – one from within the region (the Arab world) and one from outside (Middle Eastern Contemporary Art) – present equally artificial constructions, often at odd with local realities.

But what if survey exhibitions focused more on the diversity of the so-called “region” rather than the re-construction of it? What, if anything, constitutes the cultural links between nations in this region? On one end of the spectrum, a shared language and culture is emphasised to the extent of creating an imaginary space (the Middle East). At the other end of the spectrum, local differences tend to threaten a unified front. The search for what is a Middle Eastern piece of artwork suffocates and limits artists as much

²²⁰ Chakar continues, “In fact, not only do they not subside, or play a passive role, but they are hindering a certain consciousness (‘un prise de conscience’), of difference amongst the people of said region. These political and ideological discourses insist, and have been insisting for almost two hundred years, that the Arab Nation is one and that, if it is divided now, it is because of colonial interests and/or imperialism and/or Christian or Western culture (it depends who is doing the talking)” (ibid).

as it fetishises them in the popular artist du jour moment of the 2000s. If mestizaje was a somewhat successful construct in Latin America, and Mexico in particular, why could not a similar model of difference or in-between spaces be pursued by curators and artists within the region? Such diverse realities across national boundaries might be useful in creating strength in numbers. Perhaps an even more interesting option would be to look outside the European/Middle East dichotomy in creating more open art actions. Although the concept and implementation of mestizaje is not a utopic one in Latin America -- suppression of indigenous identity and autonomy has been committed in its name-- but the concept created a new category for a nation which is neither this nor that established racial or ethnic category, and is in opposition to the north American polarising of racial and ethnic identity.

Princess Wijdan Ali of Jordan asserts that cultural mixing is an important feature in Islamic art, perhaps not so different from a model of mestizaje or hybridity. "Islamic art itself has borrowed from previous civilisations since its inception and throughout its history... For example, the influence of Chinese painting on Iklhanid miniatures in borrowed forms and style was neither doubted nor questioned." (Ali 1994, 40). Hybridity seems to be a major characteristic, although seldom mentioned by artists or historians when discussing the Middle East. Jayce Salloum presents his observation on themes prevalent in Arab art, listing "Living life, loss, love, histories, territoriality, the failure of justice, home, memory, repression, power, occupation, neglect, rejection, resistance, youth, gender discrepancies, the body, sexuality, violence, ego, patriarchy/authoritarianism, representation, retrospection, fragmentation." (Salloum 28). Is this list purposefully universal in the sense that it could be applied to almost any contemporary arts scene? War, displacement, exile, gender, mapping, and authority are all other themes which artists say describe their work, as listed in art critiques and exhibition statements. Like the mythic "Latino" aesthetic, these may or may not add up to an Arab aesthetic, although the Western contemporary art world seems intent on fabricating such an aesthetic.

Since the late 1980s, survey exhibitions representing artists and artwork from this region have employed a variety of strategies, from educational interventionist to documentarist to an annotated bibliographic style, in an effort to define the cultural scene of a particular area. The most common might be regarded as a structural functionalist kind of model evidenced in commercial exhibitions such as the Saatchi Gallery's 2010 *Unveiled*, presenting a general overview of a vast culture (often an imaginary one defined specifically for the exhibition) and an opportunity for local artists to show internationally. This has led to a kind of identity opportunism with both ethical and monetary implications that artists can find hard to swallow (Ghouse 2010). In the same year that *Magiciens de la Terre* opened in Paris (and also *Art of the Fantastic* opened in Indianapolis and *Art in Latin America* opened in London), Princess Wijdan Ali presented *Contemporary Art from the Islamic World* (1989) in both Jordan and Sweden. Her goal was to offer international exposure for artists, and to dispel media-enhanced myths about Islam – a goal which Ali has pursued in a series of large-scale shows for the last two decades. Around the same time, the British Museum began its now large collection of Middle Eastern contemporary and modern art which referenced the ancient histories of Islamic art. Ali, founder and director of the Royal Society of Fine Arts of Jordan, highlighted the importance of calligraphy to contemporary art in the region, and traced the multi-dimensional connection between past and present Islamic tradition. It was an enormous effort to chronicle the development of contemporary art in nineteen countries through the work of 206 artists. The catalogue is featured prominently in most library collections in the West and North. In the curatorial texts, Ali also called attention to another key issue in the development of art from the Middle East—the infiltration of Western ideas about art as superior, and the reaction to this by Islamic artists whom Ali describes as first imitating Western art, and then ultimately combining Western aesthetics with Eastern themes and references to ancient tradition. The use of calligraphy and text-inspired design fused with European art forms like sculpture and painting became signifiers of a Modern Arab art aesthetic. Ali recounts how Arab and Islamic artists eventually rebelled against the dominance of Western ideas in their work, and re-gained a balance between inspirations from their local situations and a modernist art language

from other parts of the world.²²¹ While one of the first large exhibitions of its kind, the exhibition did not clearly discuss the differences between the terms Arab and Islamic artist, and did not directly address any of the later themes which would become so important to later shows on art from the region, such as exile, diaspora, gender.

In the following year, an interesting counterpart to Ali's exhibition was presented by Fran Lloyd's *Dialogue of the Present: Arab Women's Art* (Lloyd 2002). In contrast to Wijdan Ali's exhibition from the previous year, Lloyd focused only on women artists, and primarily those working from the diaspora in France and Britain. The eighteen artists featured in the show came from twelve countries (Algeria, Dubai, France, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Palestine, Sudan, Tunisia, and USA). All but four were either educated or based in Europe. Lloyd, an art historian from Britain, added the themes of gender and diaspora to the centre of the international discussion on art from the Middle East which was barely beginning in the 1990s.

Dialogue of the Present showed a very different perspectives on Arab art, although the same theme of blending Western (and other traditions) with local histories and ancient art histories continued in both Ali's and Lloyd's works. Her discussion of "transnational histories and diasporic contributions" would become central to the presentation of contemporary art history from the Middle East. In contrast to the development of art history in other regions, the transnational concept seemed to be at the heart of the field's development, rather than an offshoot (unlike Chicano art). The notion of diaspora would lead to a new set of post and neo-colonialist issues explored in Middle East

Contemporary Art exhibitions in the 1990s.

²²¹ Ali describes this process: "By the turn of the 20th century, Western art forms, mainly easel painting and three-dimensional sculpture, had already replaced the traditional arts among contemporary Islamic artists from areas that had an early Western-oriented art movement. This process resulted in an alienation that engulfed modern Islamic artists in countries such as Turkey, Lebanon, Egypt, Tunisia, Iran and Iraq. It cut them off from the roots of their artistic heritage and forced them to learn painting and sculpture. As economic, political and military ties with the West were strengthened, the resulting physical and cultural foreign domination led to loss of confidence in the artists' own heritage, and to an inferiority complex towards the past. Paradoxically, this rupture constituted the first stage of an artistic awakening in the Islamic world. It came at a time when traditional Islamic art, with the exception of calligraphy, had reached stagnation." (Ali and Barbican 1989)

In a similar vein to Wijdan Ali's goal of educating the public about Islam, Salwa Mikdadi Nashashibi began her curatorial efforts in the 1990s around "correct[ing] the romantic image of the passive Arab woman promulgated in the west through nineteenth century orientalist painters." (Ward 1995, 73). In 1994 her *Forces of Change: Women Artists of the Arab World*, with International Council for Women in the Arts & National Museum for Women in the Arts in Washington, USA, featuring 100 contemporary art works by 60 women artists from 15 Arab countries. It was one of the first times a US public had been exposed to this work, and notably included many artists working or schooled in the diaspora. Four overlapping themes organised the show were: 1) political and social transformation 2) environmental problems 3) present reflections on rhythms of the past 4) image and word (Mikdadi 1994).

Princess Wijdan Ali responded almost a decade later with a similar concept show about Islamic art by women, *Breaking the Veils: Women Artists From the Islamic World*. She partnered with Aliki Moschis-Gauget of Greece, president of the Pan-Mediterranean Women Artists Network, to curate works by 52 artists from 21 Islamic countries. The exhibition is currently on a three year tour of small cities in the US, having been previously shown in fifteen European cities and Australia. But in Ali's second large exhibition, contrary to her first effort, in *Breaking the Veil* not all the artists were Muslim -- some works are by Arab Buddhists, Christians and Hindus. "When we say the Islamic world, we mean the cultural world ... not the religious world,"²²² Ali said. The goal of the show was to combat negative stereotypes and misconceptions held in the west about Islam and Arab countries, especially the stereotype of the oppressed veiled woman which has been featured prominently in Western media since 9/11.

The concept of an Islamic world from which art is produced is at once religious and non-religious, heterogeneous and homogenous. The 1997 Venice biennale explored similar

²²² "Is the Arab world ready for a reading revolution?."

themes in a special edition of the exhibition, apart from the pavilions for each nation. It seems the Islamic world, not quite a nation but still located somewhere in the world, necessitated its own space in the biennial and thus the project *Modernities & Memories: Recent Works from the Islamic World* (1997), edited by Hasan-Uddin Khan. Like Ali's *Contemporary Art from the Islamic World* (1989), the show included artists from Bangladesh, Malaysia, Pakistan and Sudan. This presented an image of an Arabic world outside what European shows commonly include in the region of the Middle East. The focus on Islam as the unifying feature alters the map of the Middle East radically both geographically and in the imagination of the viewer. The term Islamic world seems to imply a specific place rather than religious tie. It's hard to imagine another religion called a 'world' of its own, perhaps because in the Western imagination the term Islam often conjures up more of a political rather than religious meaning.

The first decade of the 21st century witnessed a group of exhibitions formulated around re-addressing the multiple fictional and factual narratives about Arab identity, poignantly referencing Edward Said in the wake of the aftermath after 9/11. These exhibitions included Wijdan Ali's *Between Legend & Reality: Modern Art from the Arab world* (2002) in Jordan & the Netherlands, Sven Arnold and Abbas Beydoun's *DisORIENTation: Contemporary Arab Art from the Middle East* (2003) in Berlin, and Rose Issa's *Reorientations: Contemporary Arab Representations* (2008) in Brussels. While each exhibition represented a slightly different political background, they followed the same format of present a group of artists and curators/critics from diaspora & region, addressing media stereotypes and revisiting Said's work. But how much did this tell the larger narrative about local histories? Was a unifying front created only for diasporic groups in the West? Because Said's critique is a case of Western history, could a show based upon his original text be anything else but a show about the West?

"I want to hear--individual voices [from local artists], not clichéd or stereotyped," writes Christine Tohme, curator and director of *Ashkal Alwan*, describing her approach to the

media stereotypes vs. the arts debate, “I don't want to see the war through the eyes of mainstream media propaganda anymore; it has become completely pornographic and dangerous. I am not pitting artistic documents against the media; I am just saying that this is not my game.” (Demos 2006, 23). She explains that Ashkal Alwan, now a leading generator of local contemporary art, started with projects a series of grants for artists to create video after the Israeli bombings of Beirut in 2006, meeting the moment of crisis with an effort to reclaim the narrative.²²³

Tohme's narrative encapsulates how a new art infrastructure interacts with artist communities and the monumental effect of war destruction on the city. It is easy to see how the war theme could dominant art representations about the area, but at what point do exhibitions about war become limiting for artists in this context? Since this crisis it is undoubted that many artists are concerned with this theme, but perhaps there is an even greater interest by Western artists who want to read a war subtext into contemporary Lebanese art.

There are a growing number of exhibitions that explore the tension between local and international perspectives within the context of a city. Catherine David's Contemporary Arab Representations pioneered this effort in 2002, presenting a three-part series of exhibitions in Europe, focusing around Beirut, Cairo, and finally Iraq. The Oxford Museum of Modern Art's Out of Beirut (2006) curated by Suzanne Cotter in collaboration with Christine Tohme, and Photo Cairo4 (2009), curated by Aleya Hamza and Edit Molnar, in Cairo. Each exhibit articulates a certain aesthetic that is either unique to Cairo or Beirut, compiling local and international perspectives from artists and curators. Central to each narrative are the concepts that concern artists in each urban site: ancient and modern traditions, destruction caused by war, multiple versions of history, a

²²³ “At the start of this most recent crisis, Ashkal Alwan successfully raised funds for refugee relief. But soon I felt frustrated, needing to return to my work as a curator. (In part, I was feeling that the city's whole population consisted of nothing but the displaced and those assisting the displaced.) And so I set out to find funding for artists to produce work about the current situation. I decided these should be two-year projects, so people have time to reflect and to obtain some critical distance. The Prince Claus Fund for Culture and Development has provided a grant so... [ten] artists can create a nine-minute video.” (Demos 2006, 23).

privileging of local experience and art history from a Western perspective. Photography, and the exploration of a field between documentary and experimental video and photography have emerged as the medium of choice, especially for the cities' young artists. Art critic Nizan Shaked elaborates:

For a variety of reasons, in Egypt, as in many of the countries contributing to the global conversation of art today, some of the foremost art practitioners have not been trained within official art programs. Consequently, canonical perspectives of art history, especially Western art history, are not the main context of their interventions. Instead, we see within their practice a host of different intellectual and social concerns. Correspondingly, many of the works in Photo Cairo4 serve to analyse and demonstrate these histories and conditions to their viewers, or slyly reclaim photography to critique its co-option within an ideological frame. (Shaked et al 2009, 40-3).

Photo Cairo4 speculates what tools are needed to look at art generated in an international context, and begins to chart how we can map the intervention of art within photography's overwhelming intensification. Instead of expanding from within photography's history as fine art outwards, the work in the exhibition intervenes into the field of fine art from the outside. It does this by questioning photography's relation to cinema, the news media, popular culture, personal archives and systems of knowledge.”

As in Latin America, and the rest of the world outside Europe and upper-middle class USA, city-based exhibitions in the Middle East and North Africa can have a profound effect on art theory, in including more voices and at the same time drawing specific attention to local situations that shape identity. Unlike the abstract, constructed categories of Latin America and the Middle East, which are not places you can actually visit in space and time – Cairo, Beirut, Mexico City and San Salvador are sites that exist in real life. By exploring their multiple dimensions attached to history, culture, social-class, design and art, they can also be sites for theoretical musings. However, the problem lies in representation. It is important to ask, which views and perspectives are being ignored or erased in the imaginings of cities? Are these imaginings haunted by a reproduction of the colonial power imbalance where small elite speaks for and defines the masses?

Since 2003, a small variety of main theme-based exhibitions about the Middle East have begun to blossom, most notably on the gendered concepts of the veil, and the harem. While the veil has been used a term in the title of several large-exhibitions which describe (metaphorically) breaking it or pushing it aside, the history of the term itself became an object of investigation at InIVA's *Veil* (2003), curated by artists Jananne Al-Ani, David A. Bailey, Zineb Sedira and Gilane Tawadros. *Haram Fantasies* (2003) presented contemporary Middle Eastern art to French and Spanish audiences in a similar way, pairing it with historical images of the Orient, many of the same images with which Edward Said began his *Orientalism* critique. Critics of Western media have described these loaded images of the Veil and the Harem as often more important to Western audiences as symbols than they are to people in the Middle East. This may perhaps be connected to the prominent featuring of diaspora artists in these two exhibitions. They are creating art in a space between two or more worlds, where symbols of culture can be multiple and even contradictory. Several images of a veiled US Statue of Liberty, meant to symbolise western fears of islamisation and created by a Russian artist collective AES were censored after the opening, following criticism from local Muslim leaders. Some critics described the show as reproducing the predictable cultural stereotypes rather than challenging them.

Concurrently, the subject of controversial politics has been a major presence in most exhibitions which identify themselves with the word Arab. More recently the idea of creating art in a hyper-politicised condition has been the focus of its own exhibitions and fierce debates within the art world. Renowned Palestinian artist/activist Emily Jacir has refused to participate in an exhibition which includes work from Israeli artists. Palestinian artist/curator Kamal Boullata and Israeli historian/curator Gannit Ankori have been involved in a bitter and very public dispute over insider/outsider perspectives and the curating of Arab art. Once colleagues and friends, Boullata's seething *Art Journal* review of Gannit Ankori's anthology *Palestinian Art* (2005), accused her of stealing ideas from her Palestinian colleagues and not crediting the work of insider curators and historians in her work which was promoted as, "the first in-depth English-language

assessment of contemporary Palestinian art... offer[ing] an unprecedented and wholly original overview of this art in all its complexity.” (Ankori 2006). Ankori sued Boullata and Art Journal for defamation, after which the journal’s editor sent a letter to all libraries and subscribers requesting that the review be removed from that edition of the journal. Many libraries, like the San Francisco Art Institute had the letter sewn in to the journal next to the review, attesting to the academic scandal. Boullata published his own historical work several years later in 2009, *Palestinian Art from 1850 to the Present* (with a preface by John Berger), billed as "the first insider's study of Palestinian art" (Deuchar 2009). Once critic described Boullata’s book as “full...of urgent visual imagery whose language and strategies are ultimately unfamiliar, whatever their surface appearance, to the complacent western eye” and an interesting addition to post-Saidian writing on Palestinian art as not “necessarily part of the self-conscious east-west discourse which so preoccupied Edward Said.” (Deuchar 2009).

Academic and artistic debates continue on the interconnectivity and meanings behind Palestinian and Israeli art. The hyper-politicised kind of art produced about this context has come to be symbolic of a larger issue about neo-colonization and Western imperialism in the Middle East, in much the same way that gender roles in the Middle East have become symbolic in the West, often representing the perceived ‘otherness’ of the East. If there is a future for theme-based shows of art from this region, it would be interesting to see these debates challenged and presented in new ways to other audiences.

Most recently, there have been a small but increasing number of exhibitions that move away from the survey model towards theme-based shows exploring the space between fact & fiction. These shows engage (or pretend to engage) in the teaching of national narratives, and experiment with invented documentary as a metaphor for multiple truths, identities and multiple versions of history. The 3rd Riwaq Biennial of 2009 in Palestine explored these issues by beginning with the question of whether an exhibition about a place can take place in a non-place, or in other words in a state that is not a state. Especially when survey exhibitions can either willingly or accidentally present

themselves as an authority on a topic, more investigation into invented truth is needed in a region that is also a place and not a place. To quote Pablo LaFuente's critique of Catherine David's *Contemporary Arab Representations*, "What art, when freed from a narrative of progress, can do is open the doors to situations that reveal a different system of organisation, a different way of dealing with things." (2007). In the context of culture(s) and realities that are still unknown not just in the West, but in most of the world outside the Arab worlds, art could perhaps function as a door that leads to a more openness of possibilities, rather than an explanation of a static, non-existent cultural place.

To conclude this long, at times meandering, chapter on the institution of biennials and its effect on art from the South, I present the following description of an experience with another institution: war. Visual artist and writer Zena el Khalil uses personal and collective experience to write about the afterlife of war. The genres of contemporary art from both Latin American and Arab worlds have been informed by many social, political and historical factors, although the same could be said for any other region and genre of art. The difference between before and after the war, before and after the revolution, before and after the violence, however, are two lines of thought which have been explored by thinkers and creators in these two regions in many profound ways (as discussed in this chapter). For el Khalil, part of this process meant reporting to strangers and friends in the diaspora as a blog correspondent during the war. In her novel, *Beirut, I Love You: A Memoir*, fashioned out of letters, email, and personal experience, her account speaks to the kind of necessary politicisation, entwined with collectivity and other issues around language brought up by the possibility of a minor expression.

When our Lebanese men began to emigrate, we became conscious of their disappearance. Those with dark hair and dark skin began to vanish; they said they were being welcomed in the Arabian Gulf. Those with light hair and blue eyes left the country; they said that Europe and Amreeka embraced them with open arms.²²⁴

²²⁴ El Khalil continues, "Women fell in love with women, not because they were born to do so, but because they were bored and lonely and it was easy to do so, despite the fact that, by law, in Lebanon, it is illegal to "partake in a sexual act that goes against nature". They held hands in public and no one noticed. They kissed in the bathrooms of nightclubs and no one cared. They spoke in code and poetry. They danced to

Artists from the South at the 21st Century Venice Biennale: Four Case Studies

This section builds upon the construction of the South as imagined through art and its histories and the formulaic curatorial models for integrating this art into a global art history, by asking how four Latin American and Arab artists were integrated into the oldest, most traditional quintessential representation of the Northern canon and its dominant hegemonies.

There have been many cases of artists coding their works with resistance and subversion while becoming part of the Art-Institution in Euro-centric history, exhibitions, collections, biennials and curatorial models and narratives. The drive to commodify the resistance of the avant-garde has long been part of the machinery of art history and its resistance/integration dialectic. But what is different about the context of the 21st century Venice Biennale is that its machinery²²⁵ is that now, like never before, focusing on the South.²²⁶ For hundreds of years, the Venice Biennale system signified the tradition of excluding and isolating artists and curators from the South as part of its “maintenance of the discriminatory nature of the Western dominated art world” (McEvelley 1993, cited in Lennon 2009). Now that a paradigm shift has begun, what stands to be gained and lost from the increasing spotlight on the South filtered into this re-producer of an institution, a thermometer into the political economy of art?

their own rhythm. Everyone was just happy to be in love and be loved. After the war, no one wanted to follow rules. We were all tired of them. After the war, lines began to blur. Lines at the nightclubs. Lines to the bathroom. Lines of coke. We drank all night. We danced. We drove. We loved, we made love. We found new spaces that we created great works of art and literature that were so acerbic, they were actually beautiful.” (el Khalil 2009, 88-9).

²²⁵ To name a few of the gears in the clockwork: curatorial narratives, art stars, star curators, inclusion/exclusion, a prize system with an Olympics or World’s Fair kind of aesthetic.

²²⁶ While paradoxically, Paradoxically, biennials in the South, like the Havana Biennial, are increasingly focused on the North.

Can artists from the South withstand the test of this spotlight, the promise of wealth and power, the impending objectification that is secured by the circuit system of the spotlight? Does the presence of these artists and their artwork in the global spotlight represent a decolonial moment in which their predominance at the Bienale is able to transform the structure that has oppressed/ignored them for so long, and bring about the “new international order of art and culture... in economic and informational realms”?²²⁷ Or in other words, to borrow the exhibition taxonomy put forth by López (2005), does the presence of artists from the South at the Venice Bienale amount to a queering or inverting of the whole biennial system, as many believed the Havana Bienial would do? Or is Venice just another way to categorize the world’s art by making it fit into a Euro-centric mold that can forever be replicated throughout the corners of the world, much in the same way the old systems of coloniality have multiplied through the replication of capitalism?²²⁸ The following four cases explore these questions regarding the entrance of four artists in the Venice Bienale circuit through four archetypes of hegemonic subversion: the witch, the invisible man, the martyr, and the alchemist.

Teresa Margolles at the 2009 Venice Bienale

²²⁷ This was, afterall, Mosquera’s utopian hope for the early Havana Biennial.

²²⁸ After becoming part of the Venice Bienale roster, does artwork from the South become part of another Western grand narrative, as art historian Hassan (1999) has suggested, another cog in the wheel of “multinational capitalism, the real cause of identity-based conflict and suffering”? (Zizek 1997, Camnitzer 1994, both cited in Lennon 2009).

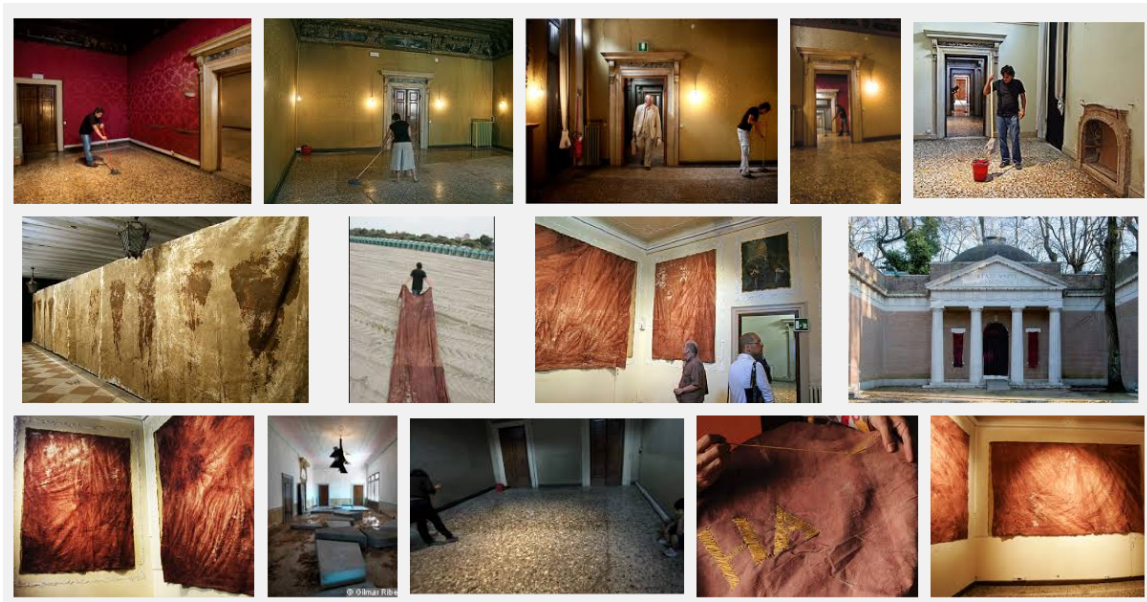


Image 3.1i. Images of Teresa Margolles' *¿De Que Otra Cosa Podríamos Hablar?* at the 2009 Venice Biennale's Mexico Pavillion and USA Pavillion (right hand middle image with "flags" over windows and doorway). Screenshot taken from google image search.

In the Venice Biennale of 2009, Teresa Margolles brought the international art world to an almost forgotten site of contamination, bio-waste, a post-crime scene in "*¿De que otra cosa podríamos hablar?*" The first scene greeting visitors who arrived at the Mexican pavilion was a single person dressed in ordinary black clothes, mopping the floor of an empty sixteenth century Venetian palace. But the floors are not being cleaned with the usual washing fluid and water. Instead the mop (and floors) are drenched in a mixture of water and blood from those murdered as a result of the war on drugs in Mexico, a war which has claimed at least 28,000 lives since 2006. The mopper is a family member of the dead, a friend or relative of Margolles. The piece was indeed simple, so much so that it was almost invisible at first sight, easily mistaken for a mundane act of everyday, institutional cleaning.²²⁹

²²⁹ The task being performed, like the clothes of the performer, is of humble origin, usually performed by the lowest wage earners of any nation, often immigrants stripped of their rights as citizens. It is a gendered task, considered 'women's work,' as many who perform this task in both private and public are female. It is also a racialised act, as many Mexicans earn their living performing this act in the large corporate buildings of the North; there are far more brown people that perform this job for white people around the world rather than vice versa. It is a marginalized task, perform by the least empowered of the world during marginalised hours, before and after the 9 to 5 white collar schedule which takes up the prime hours of the day.

Margolles used human blood from drug war violence to mop the floors of a crumbling Venetian palace as the focal point of her solo show in the 2009 Mexican Pavilion, titled *¿De qué otra cosa podríamos hablar?*. With body parts and fluids she brought to Venice, the taboo of neo-liberal death from Mexico, “where trade liberalization results in economic collapse, where class divides widen, poverty deepens and the killings that cut down young members of the marginalised – drug dealers, junkies, prostitutes, the homeless, the unemployed and the poor – become normalized, contained and removed from the everyday lives of elites,” (Wilson-Goldie 2009).

Instead of cleaning, Margolles has her team of moppers perform the inverse of this act as they soil, instead of remove waste, from the chequered tile floors of the aging palace. They mop during the day and their bodies are central to the empty stage of the palace, making visible a task that is usually rendered invisible. Her work operates by the logic of alchemy, a process that she implements through inversions on several levels. That which is marginalised becomes central by exchanging cleaning fluid for blood, by inverting societal roles -- in this case, Mexican relatives of the deceased are dirtying the European building. This particular biennial took place when swine flu, the H1N1 virus, was still an international news event, an example of a neoliberal pandemic that was ripe in the public imaginary. By making Mexican blood central to her performance, Margolles metaphorically infects and contaminates the art world’s aging hegemonic center with an artwork rooted in the realities of everyday life embedded with crisis that seeps out beyond national boundaries and continental divides.²³⁰

²³⁰ Mariana Botey describes her interpretation of the symbolic meaning of imbuing Venice with these objects as contaminating “a Sixteenth Century Venetian palace with traces of violence, death, mutilation and sacrifice. Blood, cloth, dirt, broken glass, tainted water: all splinters of the global war on drugs.” (Pimental et al, 143). Botey’s reading of Margolles’ work illustrates a common thread throughout much of the writings on Margolles: with psychological, theoretical, and political interpretations of its visceral quality loaded with shock value. Margolles’ act of contamination through art, no doubt invokes a complicated layering/mixing up of sentiments, facts, history and ethics, as Botey put it, “a constitutive dismembering.” The uncanny, as Pierce and Doane theorise, is also related to the idea of the deictic object, which indexes or points to a specific context or occurrence.

But in her presentation and subversion of objects and actions, Margolles is also subjected to a certain kind of objectification, in which she becomes a signifier of the national. At the Biennale, she and Cuauhtémoc Medina describe the common occurrence of the artist being “inevitably a national representation.” (Margolles cited in Medina 2010, 94). Historians continue to categorise her as ‘the quintessential Mexican artist,’ whose work can stand in for a generation of art and culture. Some have even conflated the development of her work with the history of performance in Mexico. Amy Sara Carroll points out how Claudio Lomnitz’s summary of Margolles’ work is more like “the repetition of a perennial conflation of the latter [Margolles] with Mexican performance at large,” rather than a contextualisation of Margolles’s project.²³¹

In 2004 Rubén Gallo writes that Margolles is one of several Mexican artists who “practice” Mexico City in the 1990s, therefore representing it. In his book *New Tendencies in Mexican Art: The 1990s* (2004) he writes, “Margolles’s work can be read as an effort to draw attention to the breakdown of the taboo against corpses in Mexican society and to its dehumanizing effects” (Gallo 2004, 126). In a critique of both Gallo’s reading and those by Cuauhtémoc Medina, Amy Sara Carroll provides evidence of how Margolles and SEMEFO’s trajectory came to be described as synonymous with the development of Mexican contemporary art in the 1990s. She outlines how Margolles’ character becomes blurred with that of SEMEFO, highlighting how in this case one artist came to be interpreted as symbolic of a whole nation. By focusing on the marketability of understanding Margolles as a performance (“both as an artistic form and as the author-function”), Medina falls into the trap of conflating the artist with the collective whole of a region, “SEMEFO’s and Margolles’s corpora become indistinguishable in Medina’s arguments... the slippage also lends itself to a discursive chain reaction... whereby Margolles seemingly stands in as a part to the whole (even as she is apart from that

²³¹ In *Death and the Idea of Mexico* (2005), Lomnitz describes the artist as “mobilizing” human remains from Mexico to call attention to a universal condition of modernity: In their characteristically heavy-handed way, Mexican performance artists have hammered the point home, most notably Teresa Margolles, who uses “the morgue and dissecting room as her atelier” and then mobilises traces from the nameless and anonymous victims [to] draw attention to inhuman relationships in modern overcrowded cities. (Lomnitz 2005, 28)

whole)—as representative of SEMEFO, itself representative of Mexican art, itself representative of Mexico, itself representative of a global South...” (Carroll 2004, 9). Carroll asks, “Should it come as any surprise, then, that by 2009, Medina, chosen to curate the Mexican Pavilion at the Venice Biennale, features Margolles as the representative of Mexican cultural production?” (ibid).

Instead of embodying a feeling, a national sentiment or an element of her social environment, she is pushed into the category of embodying a whole nation, of being the essentialised Mexican historical document. Analyses of this kind have been used to explain the work of SEMEFO and Margolles through its ‘Mexicanness,’ and its connection to the Mexican holiday, Day of the Dead. Like Gallo and Medina, Gerardo Mosquera uses a kind of cultural formula to locate Margolles’s work between the national (ancient Nahuatl traditions), the global (increasing violence acerbated by media-narratives) and the regional (rising crime in mega cities of the so-called “Third World”).²³² Geographic and cultural interpretations like these abound yet a reading of both class and gender are often omitted. Oriana Baddeley raises questions surrounding Margolles’ polemic fame and interpretation, which echo Damian Hirst’s interpretation of Mexico in the previous chapter, when she asks, “how important in that fascination is the juxtaposition of geography and theme? Of death and Mexico? Is the combination of gender, geographical location and iconographic tradition of relevance in understanding responses to her work?” (Baddeley 2007, 77). Locating Margolles’ work in the performatic rather than the static symbol, Baddeley describes archetypal Mexican female actions as relevant readings (“the mocking calavera or the threatening Aztec goddess, melancholic or reassuringly life affirming,”) but ultimately locates the power of the work in the way Margolles sets into motion the traces and remnants of death: “Her active

²³² Mosquera writes in the Venice Biennale catalogue: “Bizarre as it is, Margolles’ art has profound roots in Mexican culture. Dating from pre-Columbian days, Mexicans have a close and quite natural relationship with death, expressed in the *Día de los Muertos* celebrations. On the other hand, her work is a reaction to the increasing violence all over the world, and its daily presence in the media. Taking a more particular stance, it delves into the effects of growing criminality in huge Third World cities.” (Cuellar 2012)

intervention, and her incorporation of the audience into her actions, forces us to remember what we want to forget.” (Baddeley 2010, 80).

Margolles conjures up a narrative from the otherwise forgotten anonymous waste. Margolles does not let the living forget the violence inflicted upon bodies of colour through what Sayek Valencia understands as “gore capitalism” and Quijano understands as the dark side of coloniality. She chooses the morgue as her studio (not so unlike the gothic castle with its dungeons and corpses) and the murder scene as the source for gathering the materials for her artworks. She often speaks of how she was born and raised in Sinaloa, which has one of the highest drug trafficking related murder rates in a country which since the 1980s has witnessed increasing crime and murder rates closely correlated to international policy (NAFTA) a policy that has wreaked havoc on its economic, natural, and human resources. Within Margolles’ images we find the figure of the witness, whom brings to bear the heinousness of the crime to publics across boundaries and class divides, a representative embodying both an image of a state in crisis and the globalization of Mexican contemporary art. Is this witness a vampire, feeding off society, making the dead undead by bringing dead elements to life, transforming the body into something else - art? Or is it la santa muerte, the skeleton patron saint of death revered by many migrants and working class Mexicans who risk death while trying to survive the dangerous daily conditions of post-NAFTA poverty? Or a champion of working class rights and unjust systemic death? Or a reflection of the grim everyday violence created not by one person but by an entire system - is she created as much by Mexico City and Sinaloa as much as she creates a notion of Mexico in the minds of global audiences? Nestor Garcia Canclini, like Baddeley, points out in his essay on Margolles in his 2014 book *Art Beyond Itself: Anthropology for a Society without a Story Line*, (published in 2010 in Spanish) that Margolles’ work offers a way out of the ‘hechizo’ or spell of media and contemporary transnational tropes about Latin America. Of her work writes: “Las acciones artísticas ensayan salidas de este hechizo. Una es el modelo pedagogico: mostrar fotos de las victimas de una dictadura o una ‘limpieza etnica’ para volver visible lo oculto y provocar indignacion.” (Garcia Canclini 2014, 233).

Perhaps the Margolles model of unlocking national and local clichés through engaging with/becoming a national representation on a global level can be seen in the symbolic way she hangs a bloodied flag on the doorstep of the United States. She re-imagines the border with manta cloths coloured by the blood of causalities from the US-instigated war on drugs, when using them to cover the windows on the entrance US Pavilion in the Venice Biennale of 2007. Here resistance to hegemonic discourse is both subtle and sharp, employing not the shocking images of the media but the remnants of long term violence, encapsulating them in artworks that function like the devices of the spy's self-destructing communiqué or the message in the bottle thrown out to sea. She brings a strange brew of blood, water, air, and death to a place far-removed from the crime scenes of capitalism's gory exploits, evoking the figure of the witch, whose liminal status and outsider power serves to threaten, frighten and fascinate the mainstream.

Akram Zaatari (Beirut) at the 2007 Venice Biennial



Image 3.1j. Stills from Akram Zaatari's Video in Five Movements at the 2007 Venice Biennale's Lebanon Pavillion. Screenshot taken from a google image search.

Akram Zaatari participated in the Venice Biennale as part of the first Lebanese Pavilion. Perhaps his greatest feat there was the erasing of any sense of national identity marker from his work, which hung next to work featuring war-torn images of Lebanon by his contemporaries (who had no doubt been read through the lens of war-artists). He removed any traces of stereotypes or familiarly 'Lebanese' signifiers from his artwork. The context was somewhat akin to an identity exhibition or quasi-biennial: a curated

group exhibition of several contemporaries from Beirut. It was the first time Lebanon participated with a stand-alone exhibition in its own pavillion instead of in a joint Middle East pavilion. Curator Sandra Dagher²³³ partnered with Saleh Barakat to produce the exhibition they called Forward, featuring four well known names in the Beirut contemporary art generation that came of age during the civil war: Fouad Elkoury, Lamia Joreige, Walid Sadek and Akram Zaatari, and an emerging artist, Mounira Al Solh, practicing in the diaspora at the time. Zaatari's Video in Five Movements showed amateur vintage moving images of unnamed friends and family vacationing in 1970s Lebanon and Egypt – two women walking at the foot of a forest.²³⁴ It was both simple and complex, a single video projection that referenced the larger body of work that has dominated Zaatari's artistic practice and cultural endeavours over the past twelve years. The piece is one small part of a large found archive of the work of Hashem el Madani, a largely unknown studio photographer from Zaatari's hometown of Saida, Lebanon.

²³³ Sandra Dagher is one of the few well-known curators who has been working in Beirut for the past ten years, first as director of the Gallery Espace SD and currently as the director of the Beirut Arts Centre, co-founded by visual artist Lamia Joreige.

²³⁴ In the old brewery where the 2007 Lebanese pavilion was housed, Zaatari's minimal wall text hung adjacent to his four video projections.²³⁴ The text was typically bare, focusing not on the actual work done by Zaatari (collecting, selecting, re-shooting, presenting) but on the subject matter, a technique that diverts the attention away from the artist and the actual process. In a sense, the work rendered artist and art intervention invisible. In one frame of this work, a middle aged woman with light skin and black hair, wearing a red dress, ties a scarf around her head. She joins another and they walk into the forest with green trees behind them, and a green-tinged vintage film sky. The second frame shows the woman standing alone in front of beige mountains. Staring into the camera, her face is half covered in shadow. The scenes are mundane, the colour film dated, and people with smiling faces walk along a country road, offering glimpses of a family outing in the summer. It's easy to forget that this is an image of an image, carefully curated by Zaatari.



Image 3.1k. Images from the Madani photography collection used by Akram Zaatari. Screenshot taken from a google image search.

Zaatari has made many artworks featuring the work of el Madani (e.g. books, maps, installations, videos, and archives in Beirut and other international sites).²³⁵ It signals his preoccupation with history and memory as artistic medium through engaging in a process he calls “field work.”²³⁶

²³⁵ The Arab Image Foundation, which Zaatari helped to found, introduces the project as such in print pamphlets and online material: “HASHHEM EL MADANI COLLECTION. A Project by Akram Zaatari Saida, Lebanon, 1999-present. This is a long-term, multifaceted research project on Hashem el Madani’s Studio Shehrazade. One of the most prolific photographers in Lebanon, Madani has been working in the port city of Saida for more than 50 years. His archive sheds light on the life of a city during half a century of dramatic socio-political change. Part of the artist Akram Zaatari’s “Objects of Study/Studio Shehrazade,” this project explores the relationships between a photographer, his clients, his city and his society at large. To date, work on Madani’s archive, which is managed by the AIF, has produced two books, three exhibitions, and two videos. It is the AIF’s longest running research project to date.” (<http://www.fai.org.lb/Template.aspx?id=3>)

²³⁶ Susan Cotter describes how his process relates to the documentary: “Akram Zaatari dislikes the use of the term “archive” in discussing his work. Instead, he prefers to discuss the multi-strand approach that defines his practice as ‘field work’. Zaatari consciously plays on the genres of photographic practice and film, from the studio portrait to documentary filmmaking. Reinventing these traditions in an attempt to adequately reflect the dynamics of image-making arising out of conditions of war, he has developed an extensive practice in which he assumes the role of collector, researcher, or curator. He considers his different photographic and film portraits as ‘objects of study’, collected for the purposes of specific phenomena, whether it is the practice of photography in

Video in Five Movements, videos of super 8 movies of the family and friends of studio photographer Hashem el Madani shot while Hashem was on holiday in 1960s-70s Egypt and Lebanon. Zaatari's was the only work which did not appear to fit into any of the larger cultural tropes about Lebanon, namely about war and diaspora, two of its most defining features, as the media and many critics might argue.

Next to the other works, Zaatari's small scale and bare-bones video display was somewhat overshadowed by the work of his colleagues, whose pieces included prominent statements and war images or metaphors. Zaatari's small-scale video projection did not attract much attention from critics, despite Zaatari's artistic fame. The work was a vestige from a pre-war period, salvaged from the ruins of a photography studio from a bygone era, part of the archival work Zaatari had begun with his co-founders at the Arab Image Foundation, as a way to combat Western media stereotypes about Arabs. Zaatari's multi-layered images function almost in opposition to the overt war images that form the visual backdrop of the 2007 Lebanese pavilion. Does his work deny the reality of war? Or is he denying to be cast as the "war-artist"? Nothing in Video in Five Movements indicates a national landscape; it could have been shot anywhere, in a number of countries. Zaatari's images could not be referenced, unlike the surrounding images by Zaatari's colleagues who anchored their work in indexical images like a bomb exploding over the Lebanese horizon, or a migrant diasporic expression.

The presentation of Madani resists national tropes because he is a mysterious protagonist whose identity can only be read through the traces left behind in a precarious archive found in the ruins of modernity. He is perhaps a figure that cannot be forced into a definition or stereotype of Arab masculinity. Madani ran Studio Shehrazade, his commercial photography studio, in the 1950s in a shopping centre that also housed the commercial Cinema Shehrazade, after which he named his studio. Cinema from Lebanon

Lebanon or the broader Middle East, or communicating the experience of imprisonment and acts of resistance. (Cotter 2009).

and Egypt was shown there, as it continues to be shown today in other commercial cinemas of Saida. While the Shehrazade cinema featured larger than life characters, Madani's studio work featured the everyday characters from Saida, -- the musclemen and regular people hanging out in bathing suits on the beach, families on holiday and shopping in the downtown streets, caught in unposed street shots, young girls posing for photos to give to sweethearts. In his essay about the importance/possibility of using Arab cinema from the 1940s-50s as a cultural context, even theoretical metaphor²³⁷ with which to read documentary photographic images from the same era, "The singular of seeing: [Al Marra min al Nazar]" (2005), Zaatari explains the way these two sets of work - the fictional and the documentary - can be read in parallel (Zaatari 2005, 45-52). His essay sets up a theoretical and contextual model for reading both contemporary and vintage images - a model which is also at the heart of Zaatari's practice.

Madani's archive represents a plurality defiant of media narratives. It is said Madani worked on the streets of Saida, at one point ambitiously hoping to photograph every single resident of the town, and included in his archive are many homoerotic images of body builders, as well as queer images of sexuality and cross-dressing. But these are not central to this particular showing of Madani's work, which Zaatari creates for an international audience. Instead of adding these details, he redacts. This artwork is about the removal of the narrative attached to the image. Like Madani's archive of images found in the rubble, Zaatari seeks an image that is detached from narrative,²³⁸ that does not ask the viewer to mobilize or feel any certain way, that is not propaganda. This is his consistent response to the use of images of war.²³⁹

²³⁷ Zaatari describes the idea of the fossil as found in Arab cinema, and relates that to a reading of his own work.

²³⁸ Zaatari's explanation of a political aesthetic fashioned from national tragedy resembles the concept of Mayolo & Espina's pornomiseria: "Since the nineties, there has been debate about the representation of the civil war in Lebanese cinema. Some filmmakers called for making more works about memory and the war, contending that attempts to erase traces of the war were, in fact, political rather than economic decisions. These views were often confused with the war's ability to attract a wide audience. In other words, it was easy for any filmmaker to raise funds to make a film about war." (Hojeij et al 2002, 81).

²³⁹ In conversation with Lebanese video artist Mohamad Soueid, Zaatari comments on the theme of war and film in Beirut, describing his aesthetic and desire to distance his work from a marketable use of war images: "Personally, I didn't want anything to do with those who responded to a market with films about

In choosing to separate the narrative from the image, Zaatari works to restore something to the image, as he describes in the following interview in which he contrasts his work from that of his contemporary and collaborator, Walid Ra'ad. In conversation with another artist of their generation, Mohamad Soueid, Zaatari explains:

AZ: One point of contention I have with Walid Ra'ad, who created the Atlas Group, has to do with video documents linked to narratives. In my opinion, these documents are more powerful when they remain ambiguous -- that is, without the stories. I believe the stories that accompany those photo or video documents actually take away from their inherent power. (Hojeij et al 2002)²⁴⁰

As evidenced in his description of his own work, at the heart of Zaatari's approach to the tropes of war, Orientalism, and the archive, there is a questioning of the very structures and forces that propel local narratives to a global stage. He resists the creation of grand narratives about war and identity by making a commitment to promoting the many personal and diverse stories of memory. In dismantling the imagining of art as cultural testimony, as well as in the practice of taking historical data to be a singular factual truth instead of a constructed representation of a bygone reality, he removes the spotlight. Highlighting Zataari's critique of 'mobilisation images' American art historian Hannah Feldman proposes that instead of viewing the work of the Beirut school of artists as "pictures that aspire to motivate viewers to act in accordance with a specific agenda or that solicit empathetic identifications," it can be more important to consider "how these projects foreground contradiction, irreconcilability and multiplicity, as well as how they locate the importance of the narratives they weave therein." (Feldman, 319)²⁴¹

the war. In my opinion -- and without being opposed to in-depth work about the war -- any work that attempts to explore a post-war situation is about war." (Hojeij et al 2002, 81)

²⁴⁰ Soueid responds: "I agree with you. After you see Ra'ad's work, and after you discuss it with him, you see that he's a creative scriptwriter. Everything in his work is controlled. His work is a serious exercise in scriptwriting." (ibid)

²⁴¹ In contrast, Feldman describes Zaatari's generation: "While the critical reception of recent Lebanese art projects often stresses the way this work expands the field of representation to include psychological or individual truths otherwise unaccounted for by more official histories -- as is true, for instance, with Lamia Joreige's video series *Objects of War* 1-4, 2000, 2003, 2006, Joana Hadjithomas's and Khalik Joreige's *Khiam*, 2000, or even Raad's more individualised representations -- this is, at best, an incomplete interpretation." (p 319)

Zaatari seems just as concerned with presenting alternative narratives as he is with erasing them.²⁴² He uses his privileged position as international artist and founder of substantially successful arts organisations to further this mission: to offer multiple perspectives and question the presentation, documentation and collection of elements that make up a history.²⁴³ If his strategy to strip the image of narrative of any mobilizing feature and replace it with a multiplicity of narratives that complicate rather than narrate, then perhaps his conceptual aesthetic can be read through the archetype of the invisible man.²⁴⁴ Nestor Garcia Canclini discusses a certain model for contemporary artworks in relation to Teresa Margolles' work, perhaps complimentary to Zaatari's criticism of 'mobilisation images'. Canclini's 'hechizo' or spell of the spectacularisation of media images in contemporary art is similar to the propaganda of 'mobilisation images'. Images of bombings shock the viewer into agreement with a particular cause, into believing in a singularising and pre-configured narrative. In contrast, artworks that question this process open up new pathways for imagining national and cultural testimony outside of the binaries or paradigms of stereotypes.

²⁴² Mahmoud Hojeij points out in a conversation with Zaatari, "Akram...you have long insisted on the role of video as a tool for subversion, on the need for recognition of video in Lebanon... You believe in the role of institutions, you co-founded the Arab Image Foundation, but you subsequently became very reluctant about creating institutions and insisted we conduct the Transit Visa workshop outside institutions... You believe in collective work and collaborations with other artists... but at the same time you are individualist." (Hojeij et al 83). In this last quote we see emerge the character of a public persona which is concerned not only with art but with social change, with networks and structures for both conceiving of and interpreting culture and art.

²⁴³ In her thesis on AIF, Sara Bodinson points out that unlike "traditional collections governed by historians, AIF uses, organizes and collects for art – not for history," adding that "no one has fully examined the ramifications of such a foundation being started and governed by artists, even as it is now one of the largest collections." (Bodinson 2011)

²⁴⁴ Ralph Ellison's 1952 novel, *Invisible Man* is about repealing the dominant narratives on black masculinity in order to reveal one's humanity. Ellison's narrator says: "*So my task was one of revealing the human universals hidden within the plight of one who was both black and American...*"

Ahmed Basiony (Cairo) at the 2012 Venice Biennial

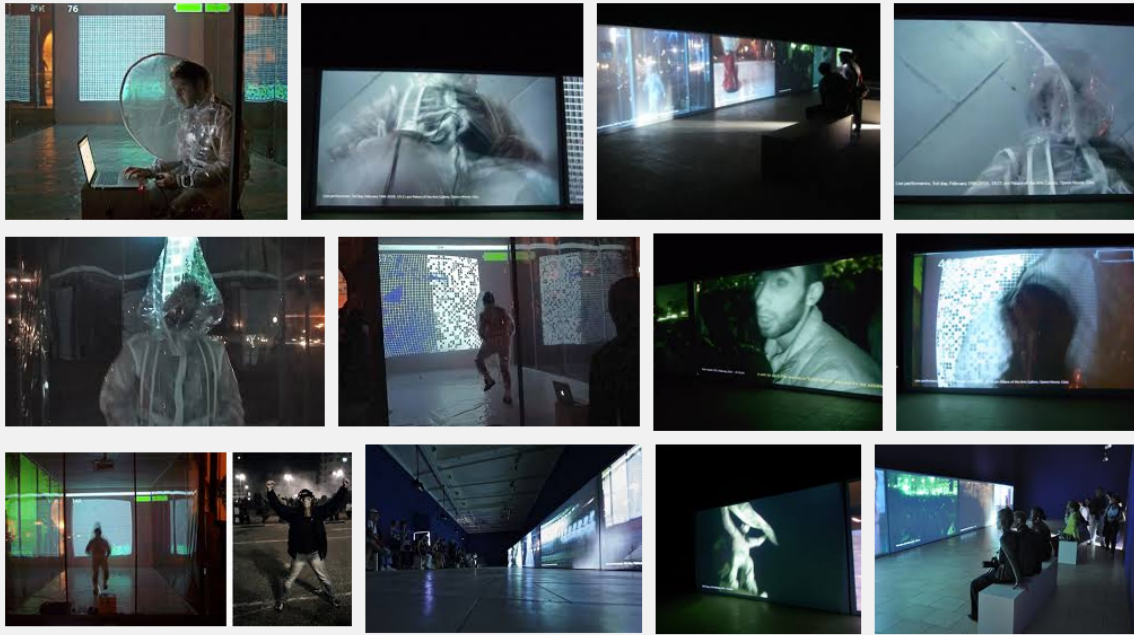


Image 3.11. Stills from Ahmed Basiony's works at the 2012 Venice Biennale's Egypt Pavillion. Screenshot taken from a google image search.

For the first time at the 2011 Venice Biennial, a new media artist represented Egypt. For ten years, the scene that Ahmed Bassiony had helped to shape – as a pioneering sound artist and educator in the new school of video art and new genres²⁴⁵ -- had gone largely unnoticed in Egypt's official selections at Venice Biennale, as *Universes in Universe*, an

²⁴⁵ Basiony participated in several group exhibitions foundational to the development of Egyptian contemporary art, including *Why Not? Contemporary Art from Egypt at the Palace of Arts in Cairo* (2011), on the new school of Egyptian art and its experimenting with technology, and *Occidentalism* (2007), featuring works on how Egyptian artists view the west in the venue of a downtown Cairo hotel. These were important steps in cementing Basiony's place as an arts innovator in the post-colonial and global paradigms of contemporary Cairo. Two other exhibitions from the same period, which featured Basiony's peers, also have meaning for the larger significance of Basiony himself, and Basiony's work as coded symbols. *Coding: Decoding* (2006) featured 40 video and experimental film pieces by Arab artists (including Sabah Naiem, a Cairene contemporary of Basiony), curated by Khaled Ramadan, as part of the festival Images of the Middle East in Copenhagen, Denmark. Through video art, it addressed the signifying of Arab identity and culture in the region and its diaspora, providing a variety of "distinctly different approaches to unravelling and recasting the underlying nostalgia for a nationalist Arab resistance and a related ambivalence over the colonial legacies of secularism." (El Noshokaty 2011). A similar approach can be found in *Indicated by Signs: Appearance in Beirut, Bonn, Cairo and Fez/Rabat* (2009). A collaboration between curators from Egypt, Germany, Lebanon and Morocco, it presented contemporary works which took as their point of departure, "the artistic depiction of individual forms of appearances".

online journal, reported in an essay on the 2005 Venice Biennial's Egyptian Pavilion.²⁴⁶ Just a few months after the start of the Egyptian revolution, the government announced it would endorse a very different choice of artist and curatorial team for its pavilion at Venice. The official curatorial team was headed by Shady el Noshokaty,²⁴⁷ himself a veteran of the Egyptian art scene who had once exhibited painting in a previous Biennale. An early mentor to Basiony, Noshokaty was also instrumental in the country's recent history as one of the first advocates of new media art, whose workshops constitute one of the earliest occurrences of video art education in Egypt.²⁴⁸

The 2012 Egypt Pavilion featured a selection of installations by Ahmed Basiony, but focused on documentary details about his life and death that focused on footage he took during the last days of his life. The footage of Basiony's public installation and performance from a year earlier was displayed next to raw video he shot while participating in four days of the revolution. Side by side, two different versions of Cairo landscapes appeared: one, consisting of a contemporary art scene which had never been widely presented to the world as an national representation, and the other, constructed of riot scenes, similar to Egyptian revolution images abounding in the international press over the past year. It was a juxtaposing of a subculture (Cairene new media art) with a regional uber-image of masculinity that had come to symbolise recent change in both the Egyptian and Arab worlds (riots and revolution of the Arab Spring). The official pavilion

²⁴⁶ "An interesting art scene has emerged in Egypt since the 1990s, but unfortunately it is still ignored by the organisers of Egypt's official pavilion in Venice." *Venice / 2005 / Exhibitions* / Egypt at <http://www.universes-in-universe.de/car/venezia/bien51/eng/egy/index.htm> Also see images on pavilion including sculpture by Salah Hammad and Hannah Feldman, "Excavating Images on the Border," *Third Text* 23, no. 3 (2009): 309.

²⁴⁷ The pavilion curator Aida Eltorie pointed out in an interview that this was the first time a woman and a person of her age had been chosen to curate the pavilion. The interview, presented as a video by Web Art Magazine, can be found at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hX9HFjNzhFM> or www.wam-webartmagazine.com

²⁴⁸ Noshokaty collaborated with Basiony in projects like *Stammer* (2007), a group show dealing with themes of self, freedom, democracy and love, commissioning Basiony and three other artists to create "interactive experimental environment[s] that change[d] on a daily basis throughout the duration of the exhibition in various media such as digital audio, video records, performances, print outs of sequential art and digital interaction on the internet." This was presented as part of the group exhibition *Occidentalism: Contemporary Artists From Egypt*, 13-23 May, 2007 in Downtown Cairo. Project description from Shady el Noshokaty's website, <http://www.noshokaty.com/occidentalism.html>

description of the work read more like a eulogy than a statement about one artist's contribution to contemporary art.²⁴⁹ After his death, Basiony's image became emblazoned on the public imaginary not for his art, but as a media symbol whose printed image became a meeting point in the protest camps at Tahrir square.²⁵⁰ The iconic image version of Basiony found in the square was echoed on Facebook, where many of his generation responded to his death by changing their profile picture on Facebook to either a photograph of Basiony or one of themselves with Basiony.

The live presence and the sound art of the artist were sorely missing from the Pavilion. After all, Basiony's art was primarily based upon juxtaposing of digital sounds with traditional music. Yet there was no representation of the larger context of both Basiony's life and death, including the art scene he was a part of, and the scene that made him a local hero after his death.²⁵¹ To exhibit the work of a sound artist without sound suggests

²⁴⁹ "The works on view, will be a two-fold production of works done by the artist, however, it is intentionally designed to reflect a random display of incidents. A year prior to the uprisings, Basiony had worked on a project titled *30 Days of Running in the Space*. Exhibited outside the Palace of the Arts (located across the Nile from Tahrir Square on the Opera House Grounds*) he built a square structure enclosed by transparent plastic sheets. The space was made for a digital and performance-based concept, in which the artist wore a sensor-fused plastic suit. which had designed to calculate levels of sweat produced, and number of steps taken while jogging everyday for an hour in the space, for 30 days (a period reflecting the number of exhibition days). Basiony took the quantitative measurements taken while jogging, then transferred them wirelessly onto a large screen, displaying a grid of colours that changed depending on the function of everyday energy expenditure and consumption. *30 Days of Running in the Space* was set up to dialogue with another set of screens: unedited documentation of an unplanned chase for change, showing raw footage of the revolts on the streets of Cairo, since the start of the risings on January 25th up to the 27th. Basiony, accompanied by his colleagues, filmed the motions around him, and upon returning home every evening, downloaded all footage onto his lapto The footage on the night of his disappearance on the 28th; however, was never found. *30 Days of Running in the Space* pays homage to the raw footage that survived Basiony's sudden exit. The exhibit reflects Basiony's life, as a well-respected Egyptian artist, as a son, a husband, a father, and a friend; desiring change for the betterment of his country.

²⁵⁰ In Eltorie's words: "A banner, a huge banner was printed right after his funeral and hung right in the square [Tahrir] and it became a meeting point. If you call up your friends, you'd say 'Meet me at Basiony' and you would know where that is. And he became a very important symbol from then on. He's in all mediums you can image. He's on the little banners on taxis. He became a very well known figure. It was that footage of the revolution, the ones that he had downloaded before he had died, that we have juxtaposed against *30 Days of Running in the Place*, to continue that element of change of trying to get somewhere but not knowing where you're gonna go." (*EGYPTIAN PAVILION - Biennale Di Venezia 1995.divx*)

²⁵¹ The exhibition failed to represent the context and nature of Basiony's art in aesthetic or historical terms Journalist Kent Mensah of AfricaNews quotes one of Basiony's colleagues in Profile: Basiony - Unsung Egyptian Hero (2011): "According to El Masry, his friend was one of the most important artists of the new generation of young contemporary Egyptian artists. "His practice varied greatly and evolved rapidly in a

a glitch in the system. Why leave this defining element of his work in the shadows, and why not reveal the local scenes and practices which led to Basiony's popularity and ultimate conversion into a symbol? The dominant image was one the international public had seen on thousands of global newsbites, a media-narrative which overshadowed the artist and silenced his work. While programming a vision of how art, revolution, and national identity are tied together, the 2011 Egyptian Pavilion failed to offer audiences a way to de-code this information outside of the media's already established understanding of the Egyptian revolution.²⁵²

The code or symbol of Basiony operates in opposition to the symbol of the Post 9-11 Arab masculinity, which entails a new vision of a young man who is revolutionary and Muslim, in opposition to the violent trope of the terrorist. Ahmed Basiony's last Facebook entry, on 27th January, 2011, read:

I have a lot of hope if we stay like this. Riot police beat me a lot. Nevertheless I will go down again tomorrow. If they want war, we want peace. I am just trying to regain some of my nation's dignity.²⁵³

short amount of time in the past 10 years. His early large scale expressionistic paintings won him the first prize in painting in the 2001 Salon of Youth. Then his work took a turn towards a more experimental direction involving new media and multimedia installations between the years of 2001 and 2005."

²⁵²²⁵² The article on www.ahmedbasiony.com read: "These are the ones, the Egyptians who have changed their country and the Arab world forever: students, teachers, artists, and a single accountant. No Muslim fundamentalists with beards, no professional revolutionaries, but ordinary boys and girls from middle class families who joined the protests based on a collective feeling of disgust that suddenly arose. Because they want a better life - they want freedom, meaning: a chance to make something of your life, without a government that tries to stop you with tactics like torture, arrestments and killing. Ahmed Basiony loved art, media, technology and Internet: when he finally got a daughter last year - he wanted a girl - he did a poll on Facebook in order to choose a name. It resulted in Salma. Ahmed was a Muslim, he prayed whenever he had time and believed in God. But also he believed in art, as a way to make change possible. "For Ahmed, it was all the same," Basem says who himself is a young accountant. "Art, freedom of expression, freedom of speech, freedom in general." But the Egyptian government didn't like free thinkers and Ahmed had to move heaven and earth to get permission to write his thesis about a topic he was very passionate about: the artistic expression of sound. Sound art was something new, everything that was new symbolised change and change was considered a threat. It was this aversion to change that was frustrating Ahmed - who was now teaching media art - so much, his friends are telling me: an education system that was blocking progress and individual development - Ahmed wanted to change this system more than anything else.

²⁵³ This quotation has been prominently displayed on the posthumous website of Basiony, on his Facebook tribute page, and in the Egyptian Pavilion, is sure to become part of the huge collective archive project to document the revolution, now underway through the guidance of Khaled Fahmy, a leading Egyptian historian. The project goal, explains Fahmy, is "to gather as much primary data on the revolution as

The grid code of coloured squares featured on the Egyptian Pavilion 2011 brochure seemed to hint at this translation of an icon through the visual representation that Basiony created to translate his body heat and movement into a digital system, creating a relationship between the live body and the technological body in his performance of *30 Days of Running in the Space*.²⁵⁴ The question of the absence of Basiony's sound art begins even before the 2011 Venice Biennial: Why didn't Basiony's sound art pieces, for example the award-winning pieces which mixed Egyptian folk songs with digital beats and melodies, become iconic like the image of his face? Ignoring (or erasing) the Basiony legacy of sound art puts his work and his persona at risk of the very stereotyping sought to be avoided in the *Why Not? Contemporary Art from Egypt* (2006) a kind of quasi-biennial exhibition where he first showed *30 Days of Running in the Place*. Mohammed Talaat described the binaries that the exhibition sought to unpack as anti-commercial and anti-establishment,²⁵⁵ two themes which were hardly present in the display of the same work at the Venice Biennale.

If Basiony's work is to be historicised as an important part of the Egyptian social revolution and the revolution of its art scene, it will be necessary to avoid the same

possible and deposit it in the archives so that Egyptians now and in the future can construct their own narratives about this pivotal period." [Guardian article] He contrasts this strategy with the old regime's strategy of narrating history, one which he says Egyptians are still extremely wary of: "Egyptians are highly sensitive about official attempts to write history and create state-sponsored narratives about historical events... When Hosni Mubarak was vice-president in the 1970s he was himself on a government committee tasked with writing – or rather rewriting – the history of the 1952 revolution to suit the political purposes of the elite at that time. That's exactly the kind of thing we want to avoid." (Shenker 2011)

²⁵⁴ The number thirty is also an integral part of this code -- Basiony was in his thirties when he created *30 Days*, and died as part of the end of a thirty-year regime, which he had witnessed from beginning to end.

²⁵⁵ Talaat wrote: "Since the 1940s, two parallel trends dominated the Egyptian art movement: the first and more prevalent was technically proficient figuration and literary representation, while the other trend was a local avant-garde current with rebellious artists who attempted to expand the limits of traditional methods of expression. In the late eighties and early nineties, the Egyptian art scene witnessed a burgeoning inclination towards technical and conceptual experimentation among mid-career and younger artists. Today the same art movement — celebrating more than a century of modernism in the arts — is an effervescent continuum of contemporary art trends, with artists who have both local and international careers but continue to live and work in Egypt; the success of many of them in the international art scene is still being documented and theorised under such labels as "Arab art" or "Middle Eastern art", which serve exclusively commercial markets and market niches. Such phenomena of international success, market "labelling" and the absolute lack of proper "commercially disinterested" theoretical and pedagogical documentation are the principal impetus for us to conceptualise the project *Why Not?: Contemporary Art from Egypt*. (Talaat 2010)"

singularising narratives that Khaled Fahmy is trying to avoid in telling the story of the Egyptian revolution with the creation of a national archive (Barsalou 2012). He is ‘a man who died for his country’ in the words of the Egyptian Pavilion wall text, but also someone who in life taught by example how to be a revolutionary artist, on the edge of even the avant-garde visual arts world. Perhaps in years to come his work and life will prove to be a bridge between East and West, an in-between place that is still being carved out by Basiony’s peers and art successors, such as Medrar and the Contemporary Image Collective.

A posthumous exhibition in a national format during a moment still of crisis and revolution, the presentation of Basiony’s work fell short of presenting an important new development in the Egyptian art scene. In describing his unique contribution to this scene, Jancovich describes Basiony as fashioning his artistic voice through the fusion of traditional sound and performance, and tech-based art by “developing a strong personal language, experimenting with popular forms to produce a visceral, charged energy.” (Jankowicz 2011). Basiony was also a catalyst: “Supplementary to his formal teaching work he organised educational workshops for digital, live and sound art, enabling numerous young musicians to enter the field.” (ibid).²⁵⁶ Instead of this genius of everyday innovation the martyr’s image overshadowed the artist with media-narratives intact.

²⁵⁶ Jankowicz also sites similar musings from Basiony’s contemporaries: “What he was doing with his music, performances, artwork and discussion had resonance with others and opened up thought for others,” says artist and musician Hassan Khan.” (Jankowicz 2011)

Ronald Morán (San Salvador) at the 2007 Venice Biennial



Image 3.1m. Image of Ronald Morán's Home Sweet Home installation at the Latin American Pavillion in the 2007 Venice Biennale, photo courtesy of Ksteinmetz Art Gallery.

In 2007, Ronald Morán represented the Salvadoran urban contemporary art movement at the Biennale with an installation next to works from Cuba, Bolivia, Peru, and other countries that could not afford to fund their own pavilion.²⁵⁷ The theme of “territories” was chosen for the Latin American Pavilion in the 52nd Biennale; Morán's piece reflected the transition of territory between war and peace, crisis and post-crisis. Art from El Salvador, like the country itself, had long been marginalised even in the region, its artists hardly internationally known. Though often stereotyped as a poor copy of canon art from the West or other more central parts of Latin America, the country has had an arts

²⁵⁷ This is telling of El Salvador's relationship with the biennial, as it has never had its own pavilion, although often participates through the management of the Instituto Italo-Latino Americano (IILA, the Italo-Latin American Institute), “an intergovernmental body in which Italy and the twenty Latin American countries are represented, to organise and coordinate Latin American participation at the exhibition.” (*ArtNexus* 2007). This is an example of the way the so-called ‘third world’ has been separated or isolated from the first within the structure of the Venice Bienale, continuing even as artists from Central America began to be recognized for the first time in the prizes awarded at the exhibition, starting in the 2000s.

infrastructure since the 1800s, and a boom in the international market when art was sold as war souvenirs throughout the 1980s.

Morán's installation (400 x 300 x 235 cm), *Hogar Dulce Hogar*,²⁵⁸ was modelled after a working class Salvadoran kitchen, near the white-swabbed spoons, pots and pans, there is also a machete and a man's belt covered in white, lying on the kitchen table. Every object in the installation is covered in a synthetic white cottony material, creating a completely white environment. For Morán, it spoke of an almost invisible violence normalized as part of everyday life. Symbols of domestic violence, the machete and belt misused as weapon, are set on the kitchen table, a male terrain violence inside what he describes as the female domain of the kitchen. Moving from the national context of a long civil war filled with bloodshed (the period in which Morán came of age as an artist) to the normalized systemic violence of a territory controlled by gangs and rife with a security and economic crisis, Morán expresses this transition with the form of 'white on white'. Many artists from his city have used this language of 'white on white' to describe the post-crisis period.²⁵⁹ But instead of symbolizing the 'peace' that is assumed to follow war, in this case it is used to speak about continued, though more covert violence that inhibits the country from moving beyond crisis. White, instead of red, stands in for the violence that became naturalised in San Salvador, after a long civil war which divided the country into militias and later gang territories, engendering poverty and violence

²⁵⁸ Morán had previously shown *Hogar Dulce Hogar* (2004) at Art Basel Miami Beach, in 2004, and sold within minutes of the opening of the fair to Marty Margulies, a North American real-estate developer whose art collection was listed as one of the top 200 by Forbes in that same year (and includes works by art stars such as Francis Alÿs, Jeff Wall, Vic Muniz and Takashi Murakami). Subsequently, the piece was re-shown in Margulies' private museum, The Margulies Collection at the Warehouse, and also in other reconstructions of the same installation at the Museum of Modern Art in Bogotá and in a Los Angeles gallery. After the biennial, *Habitación infantil* continued to travel the world, appearing in similar versions at the 2008 Bien al Cuvee in Austria and the Tenth Havana Biennial in 2009. It was one of the first times a Salvadoran contemporary artist had received this kind of international attention. (Littman and Morán 2004).

²⁵⁹ Born 1972 in the small town of Chalchuapa, El Salvador, Morán came of age in the 1990s, finishing a degree in graphic design and art at Universidad Dr. José Matías Delgado San Salvador in the same decade which witnessed the end of the Salvadoran civil war in 1992, with the signing of the Peace Accords. His generation of artists experienced war as an integral part of their adolescence life, just as they also witnessed the beginning of the peace period, a time marked by questions, post-war crime, urban disorganisation and an insecurity that still continues today. (Interview with Author).

throughout the private and public sector. ‘El blanco violento’²⁶⁰ is the local term used to describe the visual language that has become a feature of contemporary Salvadoran art. The majority of the artists who participate in this movement have explored themes of violence and security through the use of white on white.

Morán was one of the first to use this aesthetic as a way to react to the national context, and his use of it in a platform such as the Venice Biennale served to crystalize this aesthetic as related to a moment in Salvadoran contemporary art.²⁶¹ Through this work, he achieved a level of fame unprecedented by any other contemporary Salvadoran artist.²⁶² *Hogar, Dulce Hogar* operates on the level of addressing stereotypes by inverting their meanings and visual representations into negatives or opposites of commonly accepted tropes. Black is no longer the symbol of violence and death -- instead, in Morán’s work it is white. He turns violence into tranquillity, noise into silence, black into white, private into public.²⁶³

But the question remains, why and how did Morán become the iconic representative of his generation of artists from the 1990s who used white-on-white to speak about national issues of violence, security, and migration? Morán’s series of white cottony rooms was made right at the time of a national security crisis in El Salvador, during a period between

²⁶⁰ A violent white (author’s translation).

²⁶¹ He has used the white-on-white aesthetic in many works and various versions of *Hogar Dulce Hogar*, which he re-worked to create a series of domestic scenes (rooms depicting household family spaces with all objects and furniture in the room wrapped in synthetic cotton). In version titled *Habitación infantil* (2005), Morán removes any objects that might symbolise violence, but an eerie tone remains in the work, which features a middle class boy’s bedroom. The decor and objects are nondescript, and could be found in a variety of countries. However, when he re-did the piece for the 2008 *Bien al Cuvee* in Austria, he modelled it after a typical Austrian boy’s room, and by contrast from the original version, filled it with toy fighter planes, swords and other pretend weapons.

²⁶² Morán has rapidly become the first Salvadoran art star, a recent phenomenon. He is still one of the few Salvadoran artists to achieve international acclaim, still occupying a peripheral position within the Latin American network of art stars and curators. Not much has been written academically nor historically about the importance of his work, although its impact is notable in aesthetics and local scene of the capital of San Salvador, where Morán continues to live and work as a leader in the contemporary art world.

²⁶³ The white room operates, to some extent on the same level as Cildo Miereles’ *Red Shift I: Impregnation* (detail) 1967-1984, as a symbol of naturalised violence. In art theorist Sueli Rolnik’s interpretation, Miereles’ all-red middle class living room from the 1970s, represents the spilling of blood from violence and torture that became commonplace under the dictatorship

1999 and 2005 that was marked by one of the highest homicide rates in Latin America, along with kidnappings, assaults and burglaries as the control of the country's territory switched from previous militias to gang organisations such as the Mara Salvatrucha, migrants who were being deported from the US back to El Salvador by the thousands.²⁶⁴

As one of the most well-known contemporary artists in his region, Morán is still largely unknown outside Latin America. Despite his entrance into the isolated group pavilion structure of the Bienale, his participation left an indelible mark on the Salvadoran scene, historicizing a moment expressed in the white on white tendency that has become known as a characteristic of Salvadoran contemporary art. While demonstrating the influence of the institution of the Venice Biennale in the creation and fixing of art histories around the world, it also demonstrates that each artwork is coded with different meanings for different contexts and audiences. The Biennale of the 2000s can be, perhaps, an omega point, a place where for a moment various planes of existences and diverging temporalities converge.

Conclusion

What is the price of making room for “new voices” to be heard? Mis-representation of a genre, an art form, a country, even a whole geographic region haunts each of these cases at the moment of entrance into the holy temples of the old world's art institution. The Biennale artist is constantly being re-created, re-imagined as their persona ellipses the actual artwork, cycling through the biennial rosca. In some ways this system is also

²⁶⁴ Other artists were making works about the national security crisis, and Morán also participated in group exhibitions about this theme, like *Lo Inesperadamante Domesticable* (2005) produced by the artist group Adobe of which he was a founding member. Even the architecture of the capital city underwent a huge change during this time, while El Salvador was also becoming more of an urban than rural country, with 30% of rural inhabitants re-locating to the city and a tripling in size of the urban capital. Between the 1980s and mid 2000s, much of the buildings and homes in El Salvador constructed barriers around their properties -- metal walls, corridors with a series of look out points, several layers of barring around windows and doors, in response to the growing insecurity. Many wealthy and middle class residents hired armed security guards for homes and travel around the city.

constantly re-creating the mirage of geography based genres (including the mythic existence of place like Latin America and the Arab world), through artist biographies and their necessary fictions. If the Biennale appearance of one artist of the South like Baciony means his image is commodified to the extent that his actual artwork is obliterated under the shadow of his objectification as a martyr, for another it can mean the validation and crowning of an artist as representative of a whole aesthetic, as with Morán's case. For others like Margolles and Zaatari, it remains to be determined if they can maintain enough agency to manipulate their own visibility, remaining outsider insiders. By inhabiting the role of a different kind of outsider, each artist, in fact, is at once liminal, subversive, compliant, and a participant in every level of the circuit's multi-layered system of interpellation.

Chapter 4

Methodology for an ethnography of contemporary artist groups in San Salvador, Mexico City, Beirut and Cairo, 2009-2012

The Case

The following ethnographies – cases from four urban arts scenes – began when I went on a long backpacking journey over several years, to learn about a kind of South-South theorising on the ground, hoping to get an idea of how collectivism rooted in local practices was working, even as it was being showcased and described in the *rosca* of the biennial circuit. I wanted to compare and contrast these local practices with the salient themes, definitions, and qualities that had come to represent art from the South in the Art-institution, and particularly the narratives on Latin America and the Arab world in this sphere of knowledge. For this task, I was concerned with representation on several levels. The first was the level of representation in the city context: how were artists collectively intervening with, representing, (or even not representing) the social imaginary of their hometowns? Second, I wanted to know how this representation was shaped by transnational connections – both within and beyond the region.²⁶⁵ Third, I wanted to compare narratives about art, culture and society that emerged from the Art-institution with narratives from local arts practitioners (as mentioned above). Last of all, I wanted to document some of the local practices that were not getting attention from the international art world, and thus were considered invisible or non-existent. I was interested in exploring how the collection of such documents and momentos from each

²⁶⁵ In this case, I focused primarily on the regional art scene as being constituted by connections between local art worlds of each region (e.g. How did San Salvador connect with Havana, or Mexico City?) and the global art scene as being constituted through connections between the local and the international outside the region, which by and large were with the art world's centre in North America and Europe (by definition, a Euro-centric centre).

collective scene could comprise a kind of anti-archive of artistic strategies, an archive more about the incompleteness of a narrative rather than about a fictional totality.

Sample

In 2009 I set out to travel the ejes of the art worlds of four cities in the global South; creating an unlikely ethnographic of four urban eco-systems that reflect the diversity of Latin American and Arab cities in terms of their exposure to the global art world and their unique urban and socio-political context.

Mexico City and Cairo, two mega-cities with huge arts and culture industries, represent two kinds of centres in their respective regions. Both have strong art scenes, though Mexico City has more of a local art infrastructure (more places to exhibit, more universities with art departments and a broader scope of genres in its scene), and enjoyed a boom in the global art world during the 1990s. Both cities are also archeological sites where the ancient ruins mix among contemporary sky-scrapers and colonial style villas. They have both been sites of national political protest – the revolution in Cairo’s Tahrir Square took place during my ethnographic research, as did the mass protests after 46 education students were abducted and murdered in Ayotzinapa, on a much smaller level in Mexico City.

San Salvador and Beirut are much smaller capital cities, but both also have strong art scenes. The Beirut school of contemporary art and its stars like Akram Zaatari and Walid Raad rose to prominence in the large biennials and exhibitions of the North in the 21st century, just as the Mexico City contemporary art boom was dying down. In San Salvador as in Beirut, an extremely long civil war that ended in the late 80s/early 90s left the city divided along political and cultural lines. Both still exist in a perpetual state of post-war violence. Although San Salvador has not yet experienced a true boom in global

interest in its contemporary art, a steady number of Salvadoran artists have grown in international Latin American and Central American art exhibitions and fairs.

Following this idea of going outside the standardized categorizing around each place, I selected cities that were neighbours, at once part of the same region and different regions. I chose a Latin American city in North America and one in Central America; and two Arab cities, both near the Mediterranean, but one in North Africa and the other in the Levantine. Two were megacities, and the other two mid-sized capital cities, whose civil wars had ended in 1989 and 1992, yet where everyday reality existed in the contradiction of war-like conditions and peace-time national policy. Two of the cities were home to arts scenes that had already made a big splash on the international scene, and artists from these two ‘art centre’ cities often found themselves obliged to represent their region, and conform to stereotypes about Arab artists or Latin American artists, even when the diversity of their aesthetics and ideas about art were strikingly different from those in lesser-known scenes of the same region.

This was not a sample of cities chosen randomly to prove some kind of overarching theory about art from the South, nor to make generalisations about a post-colonial city aesthetic as necessarily being radical or social in nature. Rather, the selection allowed a dialogue between a few scenes that shared some contextual similarities, testing the idea that their diverse strategies for interacting with the city could emphasise the themes rather than the cultural identity of the artist. Instead of focusing on an in-depth ethnography in one city, or one neighbourhood, as is customary in ethnographic doctoral research, I wanted to test out a kind of macro-level perspective on a few of the basic strategies and methodologies, while bearing in mind that some cases would be more developed than others. In describing the scope of this project to my informants – participants who worked in the regional or local art scene of each place – I was met with three kinds of responses. The first most common was intrigue: they were curious to know what artistic strategies from these four places could have in common (often hypothesizing aloud and staying in touch to hear about the findings and publications of the research). Many of the

practicing artists working locally affirmed that they also saw a connection between these four contexts for art-making and artist's roles in each place, though admitting that much more research and dialogue was lacking and greatly needed. Lastly, a few artists and curators tried to offer their help to me by suggesting I "correct" my sample to stay within the set categories of nation and region, and/or narrow my research to one site. These responses suggested to me that 1) I was not only one who had hunches about this as a fruitful site for research and that 2) I was coming up against the set boundaries of the discipline, trespassing across some traditional categories and definitions that were constantly being re-constructed, as some practitioners were very invested in them, having profited from these limits, in some cases even building a career out of them. One curator and several artists also reflected back to me that they thought my project showed how art from these places could be appreciated through the lens of its universally important qualities, with meaning for other artists and art scenes in distant places. They expressed to me that they enjoyed seeing art from their region being recognised not as marginal, peripheral or as a definition of local life, but as universal -- a category usually reserved for Eurocentric art.

Over the course of four years, I spent several periods of two to six months living in each one of these cities, to see if the art scenes had anything in common, how they might speak to each other's conditions, each other's strategies and survival techniques. With the artist group²⁶⁶ as my unit of analysis, I set out to learn the conditions of collective work in each place, asking: What kinds of artist groups were operating at a local level within the contemporary arts scene, and what kind of collective work were they doing? How were they doing it? What kinds of issues and themes were important to them? What inspired them? What did they love or hate about the larger art scene (regional, transnational, global)? How did they feel about their own visual culture being depicted by large "1st world" institutions? What structural forces shaped their world (outside funders, other countries in the art world's centres, the state, poverty, wealth, class, conflict, crisis,

²⁶⁶ I use this term to describe two or more artists working together in the field of contemporary art, unified by a name and a common project.

diversity, tourism, ancient art histories, and so on), and how were these issues represented, encountered – even intervened upon by artists working collectively?

At the heart of this case study is the idea that ethnography can be a useful tool for understanding art and society, performance and city. My goal, as an ethnographer was to find out what is going on collectively at any given time in the contemporary arts scene of a city, instead of letting the art-institution select for me a small group of artists, groups and artworks that appear on a transnational stage after having been filtered through curators, mappings (centre/periphery), time, historians, connections, and market strategies. Although I found many of the art pieces and actions to my liking (and some very distasteful), I am not interested in evaluating the art actions and artworks of these collectives and their members primarily for their aesthetic merit nor for their ethics (these are the two primary ways social art practices have been evaluated by contemporary curators and art historians). I am more interested in a social reading of the art actions and artworks of these groups to examine how art affects, represents, and intersects with society (and vice versa). The belief that these cosmologies, understood by Foucault as heterotopias,²⁶⁷ could reveal an image of city is driven by the ethnographic approach of revealing the unwritten rules that most abide by without articulating why or how. It is here that the underbelly and hidden *ejes*²⁶⁸ in any given society become visible (be it the art scene or a larger, urban social scene). These are the *ejes* that are ever-present in the everyday movements of the city, but often get lost or distorted when local artworks and local images or renderings of the city are transported to the biennial stage or encased in museum collections (or even published in mass media). I wanted to know how these *ejes* inform, though not necessarily dictate, local art practices. I also wanted to know how those art practices, in turn, inform the city, since every group I encountered created artworks and actions of a social, interactive nature.

²⁶⁸ I use the Spanish-language term *eje* here, borrowing from a term many of my informants used in our discussions and interviews, especially when describing back to me the concept behind my study. It has been translated into English as: axis, main line, core concept, or at the heart of (e.g. at the heart of the matter). In Mexico City, the large multi-lane highways that cross the city are named *ejes*, like *Eje Central Lazaro Cardenas*, which splits down the city from North to South.

There were already many obvious, though overlooked, parallels in the socio-political conditions of the four cities in this study. All had ancient art histories and traditions of social activism, and in some ways were neither centres nor peripheries in the concentric circles of city, nation-state, region, art world, each playing a number of coexisting roles within a pan-ethnic region.

The presence of a strong local art history, dating back centuries and crossing state boundaries, was also an important characteristic when choosing my sample. In both Latin American and the Arab world, language, religion, culture had been refracted through the lens of pan-ethnicity and post-colonialism in similar though not identical ways. Pan-ethnicity in both regions had also been the inspiration for political and nation/region-building projects (some failed, some still existing). I wanted to know how the local art worlds and art making of each place engaged with (or even ignored?) the presence of these regional traditions and histories – and stood out in opposition to the quality of “newness” often used as a label for art from the South.

Given these conditions, I assumed there would be artists working collectively in the contemporary arts scene of just about any large city in this region. This turned out to be a radical assumption when it came to cities in the global South. Curators, artists and historians (local and international) often told me there were no collective groups in any of the cities I was concerned with, and tried to steer me towards more well-known examples of artist collectives in other cities (though even these were few and far between). I realised, only later, that the collective scenes in each place were rendered invisible for several reasons. Their invisibility was more about a general lack of knowledge and lack of importance attributed to their activities, and having to do with the fact that these groups did not fit into traditional categories or structures of artist collectives from the past, (hence an unwillingness on the part of historians to label them as artist collectives). The kinds of collectivisms I found did in fact share many similar strategies and characteristics, despite their disparate locations. Two re-occurring characteristics stood

out as key to understanding these phenomena. The first is that, quite differently from the definitions (and models) of artistic collectivity posited by art historians and even anthropologists, many of these groups followed a kind of institutional model in their activities. That is to say, while most did not become part of the Institution, instead they co-opted and appropriated some of the same roles claimed by art institutions, albeit usually without a corporate culture or mission. In their thinking, planning, and art-making, they acted like a kind of counter-institution (sometimes even parodying an actual institution). The second characteristic is that the groups drew from several different spheres to inform both their collective practices as a group and their individual artworks. Unlike many of their peers in Northern cities, these particular groups were operating both inside and outside of epistemologies produced by Eurocentrism. In his 2009 book on Eurocentrism, Samir Amin describes “the most extreme ideologies of Eurocentrism” as adopting “an idealist theory of history according to which capitalism is the product of [the] development of [modernity] in religious interpretation,” in other words, a mythic explanation of how Christianity developed modernism and thus capitalism (a rationale not so unlike Quijano’s definition of Eurocentrism as part of the colonality of power) (Amin 26-27).²⁶⁹

While the artist groups I met with were familiar with this kind of knowledge (and its myths) from the Eurocentric history of art they learned about in art school and other institutions (sometimes by travelling, or studying abroad, as well), they were also informed in their daily and long-term practices by local histories, which included ancient art and architecture histories -- to which they are in much closer proximity than any kind of mythic Greek ancestor or mythic (protesant) work ethic often understood as innately modern or capitalist.

²⁶⁹ Amin further explains: “The success of Christianity, which participated in the rise of modernity in Europe, has given rise to a flourishing of “theories”... The most common, which has become a sort of generally accepted common ground that arouses not the slightest bit of critical questioning, is that Christianity bore within itself this exceptional evolution. The “genius of Christianity” is, thus, reconstructed as one of the myths, alongside others, such as the Greek ancestors and Indo-European racism, from which the “European miracle” is explained (i.e., the fact that modernity was invented there and not elsewhere). The most extreme ideologies of this Eurocentrism adopt an idealist theory of history according to which capitalism is the product of this development in religious interpretation.” (26-27)

I found that the urban forms of collectivism I encountered in these four cities could not so easily be categorised into any one of the best known forms of art collectivism from past generations. These three most cited and recognised categories tend to fall into three conceptual models:

- The idea-exchange group: the collective that gets together to exchange ideas (art, politics, whatever) but produces separate pieces (like the *Taller de Gráfica Popular* of 1930s Mexico, or *el Taller de los Viernes* from the 1990s)
- The single-author, single-project group: the collective that does not have a name but gets together to create a project which is then authored by only one artist, like the great muralists). It involves a division of labour that often follows a protocol of the collaboration of the master artist with both technicians and apprentices; the technicians usually continue to work in industrial arts and do not become famous; the apprentices often includes several artists hand-picked by the master artist, who later become famous.
- The multiple-author group: the collective which produces co-authored works, implying a degree of anonymity (like *Los Carpinteros* in 1990s Havana, or the performances of the feminist group *Bio-Arte* in 1980s Mexico). The division of labour is usually defined by each group of collaborators, sometimes differently for each new work.

It's not that the new groups of the 21st century city eschewed these models completely. Instead, they incorporated some, or even all of these characteristics – after all, they had all witnessed examples of these three well known kinds of collectives, and told me as such, citing examples from three spheres: 1) local art histories (other collectives and groups that had come before, and had even taught them), 2) European and Northern art histories (for example, the Situationists), and 3) collectives outside the art world (like the Zapatistas). But the striking difference between these groups and the previous most well-known models, is that these groups adopted a model from outside art-making, a model more like an institution (undeniably a collectively authored whole unit), and then incorporated many of the elements, protocols and divisions of labour from the three traditional models mentioned above.

Incorporating knowledge from several disciplines and case studies from four cities of two regions of the Global South, an ethnographic study of artists working collectively in groups can reveal different ways of conceptualising both collective production, and the

hidden side of cities and their *eyes* of post colonial urbanity in the 21st century. This is not to say that what goes on in these cities is somehow representative of most cities in the global South, nor that insights gained from these cases can be generalised to collectivisms from rural areas or other parts of the regions. On the contrary, the validity of this study lies in the diversity of theorising around collective and urban forms that it presents to a larger conversation on the role of art in society (and vice versa).

Research Design

Methods of scientific inquiry are languages to the extent that they constitute systems of thought, with terms and ways of framing problems that are specific to their systems. ...solutions should involve developing alternative languages and clarifying their separate objectives.

Mario Small, 2009. "How many cases do I need? On science and the logic of case selection in field-based research".

The periphery/centre model (and its limits) is the departure point for the research design of this project. But how could I design a way of seeing, thinking, and representing that does not reproduce this model? Before anything else, the task required choosing the most fertile language for research and analysis in a multi-site ethnography.²⁷⁰

Mario Luis Small describes the qualitative methods a researcher selects for each case as constituting a kind of language, one which can become meaningless with the wrong tools for measurement. In arts research, a field still undefined and experimental in many ways, this usually means that the investigator has to choose not only from a variety of methods but from diverse schools of thought, each with their own ways of asking, doing, and knowing.

²⁷⁰ An early proponent of the multi-site ethnography, George Marcus (1986, 1998) describes this mode of practice as a move away from the conventional single-site location in ethnography, to "multiple sites of observation and participation that cross-cut dichotomies such as the 'local' and the 'global,' the "lifeworld" and the "system," and therefore categorises them as "both in and out of the world system" (p.1, 1998). Ulf Hannerz differentiates between the multi-local vs. trans-local ethnography as the difference between a "collection of local units" and a series of sites that are connected, usually as places inhabited by the main subjects of the research. (2002, p.202-203)

Prior to this project, I worked for many years as a research assistant on a sociological project on immigrant identity and social mobility; as a result sociological, qualitative methods shaped much of the way that I see and understand the world, equally influencing my work as a public educator, youth advocate, and arts worker. With this viewpoint, and the desire to study how the current image of art from the global South has been constructed, I pieced together an ethnographic methodological language that would help reveal and begin to understand what remains hidden in the global sense of art and city. At the heart of this design is the practice of uncovering the processes and mechanisms embedded in everyday interaction. Even though I had some ideas about the potential functions of an artist group from my work with the Local Project collective, I wanted to remain open to the possibility of proving wrong those initial hunches, and therefore sought out artist groups working in very different local conditions. But still at the core of this investigation was the desire to examine the constitution of an individual as part of a collective, as an artist, and as an urban citizen. It was about bringing into focus a clear image of the internal and external dynamics that shape the course of these collective urban expressions.

Initially, I had to make a case for choosing a multi-site design over the ethnographic tradition of focusing in on the micropolitics of one community. While the latter can be more fruitful for lengthy, in depth experiences that can shed light on a single phenomenon, it could not address some specific introductory questions in ways that the scope of multiple-site ethnography could. I was entering the field looking particularly for answers about how and why artists form collectives and autonomous spaces, and under what context. I wanted to collect a series of stories and experiences from several sites that had contextual similarities; stories that could speak to a few large issues, and perhaps start a dialogue in and amongst themselves. For the first phases of data collection, I chose a focused approach, a method Hubert Knobloch (2005) describes as short-term field visits with intense data collection and analysis, focusing in on one specific element of society or community life. I complemented these initial short-term visits with follow up visits

and online social media dialogue, building relationships for future studies and research collection. That said, in no way should this study be considered an exhaustive, conclusive project that tells the complete stories of the art scene in each place – that kind of assumption would be not only incorrect but also practically impossible. Instead, this study is the beginning of a conversation based not upon national identity, but rather upon the actual doing and creating of collective social art practices that intervene in the social imaginary of four cities.

The ethnographic concept of reflexivity – consciously examining the role of the ethnographer’s actions and analysis – is important to my research design in several ways. As a participant observer I was keen to examine my own role within the context of each case, what Michael Buroway (2003) describes as three internal over-arching forces affecting both data collection and analysis: *habitus* (I was a foreign graduate student of mixed-ethnicity, from a Northern centre university, though not attached to any museum or gallery, seeking entry into creative autonomous organisations of Southern capital cities), *location* (we were all students of contemporary art), and *embodiment* (each of us embodying of knowledges of language, race, age, class status).²⁷¹ Analysis through these lenses may well lead to some conclusions about my findings based upon both constructivist and realist explanations of findings (with attention to variations in internal processes in each local art scene). This type of analysis might also help to explain differences in my findings from other studies on the art scenes in the same cities. But I was also concerned with the external forces which might affect both my analysis and my position as ethnographer: the recent attention paid to these art scenes by international curators and biennials, who wanted to profit from the commodification of regional art identities for wealthy collectors, and the increase in academic researchers from the North who wanted to depict art scenes in the South “through a postcolonial theoretical context that is keen to show how marginalized communities respond to a history of reification and work to subvert dominant visual forms.” (Winegar 2006, 21). This scenario has been repeated so often that it has become a trope that I wanted to avoid: the reading of

²⁷¹ I will get into the specifics of these with each case study in the following chapters.

Southern artist (and collective) as necessarily radical, subversive and anti-establishment. This is an uncritical perspective which falls into the stereotyping and abuse of resistance narratives, because of some imagined “innate” quality relating to identity and geography. And while there was indeed plenty of both subverting and re-creating of dominant discourses going on in these scenes, I didn’t want to fall into the binary trap of assuming independent arts spaces are always autonomous and authentic, and understood as counter-hegemonic (somewhat like the biennial pitfalls I mention in Chapter 4).

Regarding reflexivity, my own social positioning was significant to the gathering and interpreting of thesis data, though not necessarily central, as this thesis is not a project of identity politics about advancing a hypothesis through a performance of my own sameness or difference as a liminal woman of mixed heritage and dual citizenship, trespasser across boundaries of race, sexuality, ethnicity and class. However, I would like to acknowledge the evolution of identity politics as a concept,²⁷² which has allowed me to develop my non-traditional perspective into an alternative mapping of places and theories without necessarily having to place my personal story center and front.

Before choosing my sample of artist groups, I began by doing some background work in each scene, to develop the most useful methodological language for my study with some preliminary participant observation. Before I could select the groups to interview and interact with, I wanted to get a sense of the most well-known groups performing contemporary art in each art scene, which inevitably included some institutions and some underground spaces. I wanted to see if out of those well-known local groups, I could find ones with diverse class backgrounds, diverse political affiliations, and perhaps even diverse language use. While in general contemporary artists are often considered an elite group (privileged educational status, connections with state, and status as cultural

²⁷² This circular evolution has taken ‘otherness’ from invisible to visible to intersectional, with the transformation of the personal from Lorde’s 1970s personal-as-political to a Butlerian performance of identity from the 1990s to the 2000s queer cartographies of Preciado to the calling out of institutional multiculturalism by Mohanty to the intersectionality of the 2010s, which has all but erased the subject of otherness.

ambassadors), I felt that the study would be more revealing if I could include artists from more than one class, language, racial and political background. This is something often overlooked in studies of art collectives, and that is not to say that they are biased (many admit openly that the most famous artists from the South come from a privileged background), but I did not want to assume artists from a variety of backgrounds did not exist in each city, just because they were not visible on an international level. Perhaps because the *eyes* of the city were often drawn upon these lines, and because many of the groups were formed through generations of artists who were already friends (many of them university chums) I found it possible to identify and include artist groups from a range of backgrounds, though understandably, in some places this process was more difficult than in others.

In order to meet artist groups from range of social backgrounds, I hung out in local art spaces of the city, both institutional and underground, visiting and interacting in events, exhibitions, schools, meeting places, etc. I used the snowball method, asking artists, designers, students, curators, historians, and other arts workers to introduce me to any contacts they might know in each city, to get a sense of the art scene in general, before deciding upon which groups to focus.

In each city, I observed how artists positioned themselves regionally -- did they interact with art scenes in the other cities in my case studies, and were these other sites important to them? Did they see themselves as part of the metaphoric South, as part of a region, part of a periphery or part of a centre? Did they see themselves in opposition to the North or did they revere North America and Europe, imitating the Northern art scenes and canons? And within each city, how did the groups relate to each other - were they united or divided and what were the specific issues upon which dividing lines were drawn? Before I could ask these questions, I needed to identify several groups which were among the most active in the contemporary arts scene of each place - not an easy task since there is little to no literature on the subject. I only knew one of these cities really well, and I knew nothing about artist groups working there (nor did any of my friends or family members).

I added informal interviews with my new contacts to the participant observation I was doing, asking artists and curators, both local and international, hoping to meet insiders in the arts scenes. I asked where the artists hung out, whom to ask for advice, where to live, what to read, and where to party. This gave me a wealth of informants - curators, art historians, artists, theorists, museum officials -- although most of them were in some way working on an international level and were connected with either New York City, London or Barcelona, which to me implied a level of economic and cultural privilege. I wanted to meet those who did not have strong connections to Europe or North America, artists and artworks to which the outside world had less access. Assuming that in each city there was at least one or two institutions (be it a gallery, museum, or arts centre) which played a central role in the art scene, I set out to find out if any artist groups collaborated regularly with these institutions, i.e., those who purposefully aligned themselves culturally or politically with these institutions. I also found those groups in the local art world whom defined themselves in opposition to the local art institutions, along with others in between these two extremes. I asked my first group of informants which groups they really disliked, which artists they felt were negatively controversial, and then interviewed those groups as well. I sought out ex-members who had left the groups, along with some arch-enemies in the scene. Through formal and informal question asking and observing, I began to hear the same 4 or 5 names of the most prominent groups over and over again, and this is when I knew I had reached a level of what sociologists call "saturation." This same phenomenon occurred after I repeated these steps in each city. Out of those groups there was inevitably one or two groups which I got to know more, usually the one that offered me low cost or free accommodation, and these often became my primary cases. I ended up with two primary cases from each city, each having members from different socio-economic and racial backgrounds. There were also 3 secondary cases I interacted with in each place, and a number of 4th and 5th place groups. In total, I interviewed 1-2 members of 5 groups in each city, with further in-depth observations and follow up interviews for the primary cases.

After I had identified and selected my sample of groups I wanted to include in my study, I conducted several kinds of group and individual interviews with the members of each one. These interviews were qualitative in nature: I wanted to find out about the specific operations of each group, and at the same time understand how the history of each group was intertwined with the micro and macro histories of the city. For the latter, I borrowed from oral history techniques, asking participants to share anecdotes about their interventions in the city, and how these were tied to specific events and eras, both in the city and in the larger art world. This kind of self-conscious exploration of a theme through conversation is described in several levels by oral historian Alessandro Portelli. He defines the “expression of oral history” as comprised of three components: 1) what the historian hears (the oral sources) 2) what the historian says or writes and 3) what the source and the historian do together at the moment of their encounter in the interview.” (Portelli 1981) I borrow from Portelli’s analysis to help clarify the theoretical work that collecting, editing and compiling such narratives can entail. He also describes three ways that oral histories can be used: 1) to mine for information, or 2) for an understanding of the broader past, and 3) to enable tales of experience. These three concepts guided my interview talking points and on-going analysis; I designed these to mine information like strategies and methodologies employed by each group, and used the narratives they shared to understand how they experienced both the local and international art scenes, as well as how they critiqued and intervened upon the city (and its social spaces) as part of their art practice. By combining oral history and qualitative sociological methods, I was able to get a balance of oral histories of each group and city, as well as descriptive data on how and why the groups were operating in different spheres.

Narrative research in this case is used as a method for gaining knowledge of the local histories of artist groups, and the themes and issues that comprise local cityscapes and artsapes. This information was then used to create a thematic map that recounts various perspectives on history, culture and social interactions. An “in-between text” (also Portelli’s term) which is created from personal narrative, presents an alternative to

learning about art from these regions based only on recognised published texts or exhibition catalogues. In addition to a sound archive I created, with selections from each city and interview (which I shared amongst participants), ethnographic data from field notes and participant observation will offer a fuller picture of the art scene in each site.

In total, I studied 19 artist groups, logging more than three years of field work in four cities over the course of four years, from 2009 to 2013. I created my sample from groups who were operating between the years of 2008 and 2012 (some also disbanded during this time, others continue in operation to this day). Out of the 19, I was able to interview founding members from 17 groups. This included 43 interview sessions with founding members, 15 of these were group interviews and 28 were individual interviews, lasting in time from one to three hours. In each city, I conducted an additional five to ten interviews with artists, curators, museum workers, collectors and historians who had interacted with the collectives. Just over half of the people I interviewed are women. It is important to note the order in which I began these series of ethnographies and interviews, as this affected the ordering of primary and secondary cases. I chose one region as my primary location, and then moved transnationally to the second region as a secondary location, to see which ties and connections (albeit conceptually) could be made between artist collectives working in parallel scenes. I began with the study of Latin American contemporary art, the subject and language with which I was most familiar. The case studies from this region comprised my primary cases, and I conducted all of them in Spanish. After beginning two ethnographic studies in two cities of this region, I travelled to two Arab cities, which I chose in part for parallels in their urban context with the first two cities.

I began to study two regional forms of Arabic in the cities I chose to investigate, although with the knowledge that it was unlikely I would be able to reach the linguistic competency in time to conduct interviews in the native language of the artist groups there. Instead, I conducted interviews in English with bilingual members of artist groups, and on several occasions, with a volunteer translator. This created an obvious difference

in my data collection (one set of interviews was conducted entirely in the native language of the artist groups, the other set almost entirely in a second language of the groups), and posed a possible bias in the selection strategy of the groups. It also put me at an obvious disadvantage as a participant observer, although not impossible, as I found that many local art events were held in English or bilingually (more on this in chapters to come).

My goal was to understand artist group strategies from Latin America through a different theoretical and historical lens, and to lay the ground-work for a new kind of trans-national dialogue and constellation – in hopes that other scholars would continue this line of investigation (as well as for future studies that I might conduct). The purpose of this ethnographic study was not to create an exhaustive list of artist groups and their strategies from each city, but rather to compare strategies and methodologies from a few cases, which became possible in a preliminary way even with my language handicap. This is not to dismiss the importance of native language interviewing and participant observation in both cities; this is a first step in the conceptual leap across theoretical and regional boundaries. This is the first ethnographic study of 21st century contemporary artists groups that seeks to begin a dialogue around groups from these four cities.

After conducting ethnographic research and interviews with artist groups in two Arab cities, I got a grant to return to the Latin American cities, where I conducted the second round of interviews with my primary cases, and shared with those groups some of the findings about groups from sister-cities in the Middle East and North Africa. Using a kind of extended-case method I was able to conduct 16 follow up interviews, three years after initial contact. Sometimes I explored the history of each group just once in the interview context, although with several, which I developed into fuller cases, I had the opportunity to conduct what Burawoy calls the “rolling revisit” in my fieldwork, conducting a first round of interviews in 2009 and then a second round with the same groups in 2012.²⁷³

²⁷³ Burawoy defines the rolling revisit, as related to extended-cases and reflexive ethnography: “Conventionally, field work is regarded as a succession of discrete periods of “observation” that

Following this method of intermitted analysis and Portelli's idea of the importance of the moment of interaction between interviewee and interviewer, I introduced some new techniques into the second round of interviews. This took the form of interactive mapping/charting of each group's history and revisiting quotes from the first round of interviews. On small cards I wrote down quotes from the first interviews, ones that made me think differently about the function of the artist collective in its city or proposed new lines of thinking. I asked members of the group to read the quotes on the cards back to me several years later, as a starting point for picking up the conversation. This led to both reflection and further elaboration. The interviewees also helped me to reflect on their changing activities, purposes and strategies by reviewing a timeline of the group's history. For the mapping, I first plotted data on a large hand written map the main events in the history of the collective, gathered from the first interview and from group websites and other material they had given me previously (pamphlets, exhibition guides, posters, flyers, press releases, mission statements). I asked the group members to write in other important events in their history, plot them on the map, and then reflect on that mapping. This led to deeper exploration of the changing direction and mission of the group, as new members came and left and new projects were realised.

The revolutions in North Africa and the Arab world that were called the Arab Spring occurred in between these two rounds of interviewing. This helped give shape to a deeper conversation about possible theoretical and ideological connections between art collective strategies and methodologies in Latin America and in the Arab world, a topic that had been completely off the radar for the majority of these groups in 2009. It also

accumulate in field notes, later to be coded, sorted, and analysed when all the "data" are in. Every "visit" to the field is unconnected to previous and subsequent ones, so in the final analysis visits are aggregated as though they were independent events. In the reflexive view of field work, on the other hand, "visits" to the field are viewed as a succession of experimental trials, each intervention separated from the next one to be sure, but each in conversation with the previous ones. In this conception, field work is a *rolling revisit*. Every entry into the field is followed not just by writing about what happened but also by an analysis in which questions are posed, hypotheses are formulated, and theory is elaborated – all to be checked out in successive visits. In this rendition, field notes are a continuous dialogue between observation and theory." (Buwowoy 2003)

allowed me the unique position of finding out about some of the revolutionary actions of artist groups that were largely ignored before the concept of the Arab Spring was made visible on an international level. In the next chapters I will show some field notes that demonstrate these kinds of dialogues between observation and theory.

Lastly, I employed some methods from visual ethnography. This meant using traditional visual ethnographic methods of introducing objects or images into the interview process. I asked artists to talk about objects that were souvenirs from their performances (bookmarks, flyers, documentary photographs, pamphlets, cds). In the two Arab cities, I showed artists images from a blog I kept detailing artworks and actions from the two Latin American cities, to better express the strategies and contexts of collective practices I had already learned about through ethnography, and asked them to comment on these works from far away. Some were intrigued by this method and immediately saw links between seemingly disparate practices. On another level, I incorporated arts methodologies that artists used into my participant observation practices, such as the kind of walking/mapping Karen O'Rourke describes in *Walking and Mapping: Artists As Cartographers* (2013). If an artist group I interviewed had held a performatic walk through a certain neighbourhood, I re-traced their steps, walking down the same paths they chose as performance walks, around the same neighbourhoods and visiting similar local spots.

In short, the methodological language I built for studying artist groups in four post-colonial cities (and their transnational networks), provided a pathway for comparing and contrasting the artists' collective interactions with both local and larger *eyes* that influenced their world (to name a few: Euro-centrism, post-colonialism, social class difference, divides between the global North and global South, migration, territorialisations of the city around religion, class, and ethnicity). It also enabled an understanding of how these themes are coded in various aesthetics present in the city (visual, sonic, performatic aesthetics which artist collectives often appropriated in their work). I began this multi-site ethnography with a focused visit approach, building a

sample in each of the four cities through participant observation and the snowball method, then expanding with qualitative interviews (which integrated oral history methods), selected re-visits, and arts-based methods. The findings and field work are expressed in both the texts of the following Chapters and the archive comprised of the appendices.

The line between ethnography as social form and as art form

Since the 1990s, the practice of ethnography has been enjoying a revival, especially within the fields of social science and humanities (Gobo 2005, 5). But sociologists and anthropologists are not the only ones interested in the ethnographic resurgence. There has also been a kind of second-coming of ethnography within the art world, with the popularity of artists appropriating ethnographic methods from the 1990s to present, embedding ethnography in the process of artmaking. The results have ranged from satirical to disastrous, and echo back to the kind of socially-concerned arts practices of the 1960s and 70s. The new generations of visual artists have posed as ethnographers to conduct experiments with various social groups, infiltrating cultures of migrant communities, red light districts, urban forensic morgues, and many other “marginalized” sites. Creating artworks inspired by these places, artists have employed ethnographic methods like walking as researching, thick description of the setting and situation, participant observation by scrutinising, working with, or even living with a community.²⁷⁴ With the shift from object-based to process-based art, even the concept of ethnography itself (and not just as part of a process or practice), is being considered art.²⁷⁵ The following is an overview of the development of ethnographic practices in art, and how this trend has both dovetailed and diverged from ethnography as a social science practice.

²⁷⁴ The community is usually, but not always, one that is situated on the margins of society.

²⁷⁵ Although this notion is controversial and contested.

Of course, the 1990s revival of ethnography across fields could be seen as a natural legacy of radical politics of the 1960s and 70s. Inspired in large part by the human and civil rights movements, radical politics became a new epistemology for understanding the social, a model which also transcended disciplines, as in the case with art. Concepts like multiculturalism (and its resulting policies like affirmative action in the United States) followed the civil rights movement, developing out of the institutionalisation of radical politics inherited from the 1960s. The term institutional multiculturalism, (Ring Peterson 2007) which has been used to describe the fate of multiculturalism in the 2000s, paralleled the concept of institutional racism of the 1960s, and provided a way to critique the watering down of radical politics by including them in institutional policy, often in ways that paid little more than face value paid to social injustices, and in the long run, ended up re-enforcing cultural stereotypes about identity and diversity. But why was the 1990s, the era of identity politics, so obsessed with ethnography, and what significance does this have for the development of vastly different ethnographic practices representing the social worlds of the 21st century?

In his 2005 review of the renaissance of qualitative methods, Giampietro Gobo points out that sociology, as an area of study sensitive to social change, was most likely influenced by the concept of “quality over quantity”, a very present theme in the 1980s-90s social imaginary of many popular cultures (Gobo 2005, 3). He notes the rise of “quality” as a model in business and management. “‘Quality’ with all its derivatives (total quality, total quality management, quality control, the quality of services, etc.),” he writes, “has become fundamental to the point of radically modifying the traditional productive processes, commercial and managerial ...the success of quality over quantity, and of flexibility over standardization (two fundamental hinges both of the survey and of Fordism) had repercussions in sociology.” (Melucci cited in Gobo 2005, 5). And though this is most likely only part of the complicated story of the ethnographic revival, (as Gobo admits), this kind of obsession with the notion of quality over quantity in the social world is certainly still present in the second decade of the 21st century, an era art critics

have called part of “the long 90s”.²⁷⁶ Declaring that the era that marked the start of the ethnographic revival has not ended yet, art historian Lars Bang Larsen traces what has been called the ‘social turn’ in contemporary art, a movement that has prioritised ethnographic practices as part of the art process. He describes the focus of art’s switch from quantifiable object to qualifiable experience:

In the 1990s, the general activity that surrounded art – its media, infrastructure and social activity – became as prominent and energetic as art itself. Around the same time, art’s social turn occurred. This gave visual art a new lease of life at a point when it had otherwise been declared dead (along with the avant-garde, the novel, the human being, the author, etc.). The idea of the social contradicted the demonization of reality and presence of much of the work of the ’80s. No longer something remote, academic and monumental, art became a situation or a process. A work was now a club, a bar, a meal, a cinema, a hang-out, a dance floor, a game of football or a piece of furniture: think of Rirkrit Tiravanija’s soup kitchens, Angela Bulloch’s bean-bags or Apolonija Šušteršič’s public structures. The sole author and the contemplative beholder were atomized in works that called for togetherness, and were often created by collectives or self-organized entities. The art institution started to reflect on itself as a critical space, and exhibition formats opened up in turn. Art took place anywhere – in front of a video camera, on an answering machine, in the urban space. Everyday life became meaningful again, even a refuge from late capitalism... During the 1990s, a new economy began brimming with imperatives to socialize through email, mobile phones and, later, social media, and as social and economic processes were pulled closer together, both art and power became ‘sociological’. (Larsen 2012).

In the naming of this era of art as sociological, Larsen rightly notes, the setting for the transformation of art from objecthood to experience (what he calls situation or process) was the urban. More often than not, the urban context was the sole context inhabited by this new kind of artwork (although on rare occasions it was positioned in contrast to the rural). The club, bar, meal, theatre, dance floor, football game, and general hang-out that Larsen describes as the new artwork of the 90s were all situated in the *milieux* of the city (in the majority of cases). These were the sites of ‘togetherness’ as Larsen argues, often the product of artists working collectively or in artist-run spaces. The urban space of late capitalism became the site of this new dimension of collectivity that artists added to the legacy of art and society. To create this art, instead of paint brushes or printmaking tools, they used ethnographic methods to collect data and build or infiltrate communities – this was the artistic process and the products were situations that occurred in artist-

²⁷⁶ Larsen cites Tom Morton as one of the first art world critics to mention the idea of the ‘the long 1990s’ in his review of the 8th Lyon Biennial in issue 95 of *frieze* (November–December 2005)

constructed educational workshops, therapy centres, alternative currency systems, even housing projects. And all of this was done not as academic work like their sociological and anthropological contemporaries who were trying to make a name for themselves as social scientists, but instead artists used ethnography as a way to become artists through the creation of social artwork. Their main purpose was to practice art, through revealing the underlying hidden dynamics that shape social worlds. The artist groups I studied were no exception – many engage in practices that are ethnographic, though none consider themselves social scientists. “Entonces seríamos malos etnógrafos o malos sociólogos,” Hector, of *Teatro Ojo* told me, responding to my observation of the ethnographic quality of his group’s latest project, “porque lo que nos interesa es trabajar el rostro de la ciudad dentro del imaginario social, y trabajarlo como arte.”²⁷⁷ His answer is a good introduction to the meaning of social practice and its relevance to the concept of ethnography.

The widespread phenomenon of social art prompted historians and art theorists, like Larsen (among others) to look for new categories to describe experience as art. Since the 1990s, the label of social or participatory practices has included the context-based forms of art that are site specific, performative, public, and/or community based. All of these forms prioritise the elements of collaboration and interaction, between artist, place, and one or more social groups. Social practice describes a kind of art practice that takes the social sphere as its main setting and site of production, in which the artist researches and then intervenes in this space, revealing both an artistic process and larger social dynamics that are at work in the society, and on display in this microcosm. For Teatro Ojo, this meant intervening in the social imaginary of their city during the lead up to the presidential elections, creating an archive of stories about how local citizens choose a candidate to represent them, with their project *Atlas de electores 2011*. Their goal was to intervene in the image of the citizen and their city, though not by representing them on

²⁷⁷ “So in that case we would be bad ethnographers or bad sociologists,” Hector of *Teatro Ojo* told me, responding to my observation of the ethnographic quality of his group’s latest project, “because what interests us is to work on the face of the city inside of the social imaginary, and work on that as art.” (Author’s translation)

canvas or marble, but rather representing these on a conceptual level. This kind of social practice is related to the genre of theatre because it is concerned with actors in time and space, with the scenic arts, social sculpture or architecture, and the idea that these elements can mirror and reveal larger social processes. While social practice is less about object making than other artistic genres, like painting or sculpture, it is still about image making, but on a conceptual level that is concerned more with process and method rather than final product.

For a more concrete example of the similarities between artist as ethnographer and social scientist as ethnographer, consider a comparison of methods and outcomes between the work of the infamous visual artist Teresa Margolles and the famous anthropologist, Clifford Geertz. Geertz, often considered one of the founding fathers of modern ethnography, studied the microcosm of games in his legendary ethnography of Balinese cock fights (1973). After years of conducting participant observation by living with his partner in a Balinese village, he analysed these experiences and represented them with theory; his theoretical model was about how games can embody societal power dynamics. His work has been interpreted in several ways, both through a national lens as revealing “the social organization of Balinese society”, and through the lens of the larger societal forces as a “ritual of resistance to colonial and then Javanese domination”.²⁷⁸ Geertz expressed his representation of this experience in scholarly books and articles which have since become methodological models for ethnographers in the fields of both anthropology and sociology, especially with concepts like ‘thick description’. He developed the latter as a method for representing the ethnographic experience through describing human behaviour in its context, such that it becomes meaningful to a larger phenomenon or process, when extracted from everyday experience.

²⁷⁸ Mario Luis Small summarises these two approaches of interpretation from the Berkeley school of Sociology, led by Micheal Burowoy, contrasting their perspectives on interpretive method of analysis and an extended case method. (p.20).

Thick description has since become a model used in a range of fields even beyond social science, like literary criticism and contemporary art, especially amongst artists who like to pair it with the methodology of walking as research, like Francis Alys for example. The artwork of Teresa Margolles puts to use a process much like thick description in an examination of the drug cartel violence in Mexico. Margolles, a Mexico-city based visual artists from the state of Sinaloa, who rose to fame in the late 1990s and has since shown work across Europe and North American, in large public art institutions and small galleries, has employed a methodology perhaps more akin to ethnography than studio art practices. In a body of work consisting of thousands of objects, performances and installations, Margolles has examined the violence impacted on the human body by the international drug trade. While Geertz chose as his unit the Balinese cockfight in a rural village, Margolles has chosen the narco-violence inflicted upon the human body, thoroughly and systematically studying scenes of drug abuse, trafficking and murder. She has collected samples from these scenes (blood, earth, shattered glass containing human gray matter), in her home state of Sinaloa, and in other neighboring Northern Mexican states. There she interviewed family members and citizens who clean up the physical post-crime mess, collected warning messages left by cartels left attached to the bodies. She has hung out with and lived with consumers of the drug trade in both Mexico and Europe, interviewing and observing users who are often unaware of the processes of violence involved in the manufacturing and transnational marketing of the drug. And then she has turned her eye to the public morgue, where the bodies of traffickers and victims collect, often going unclaimed for long periods of time. She interviews the families of the dead there in the morgue, a marginalized space where she has also worked for years as a licensed mortician. These methods evidence the ways Margolles has practiced many of the same data collection methods made famous by Geertz, addressing her findings, about how narco-violence affects everyday life, towards local audiences and international audiences, two groups who are worlds apart and more often than not, have no contact other than hearing about each other through the media or through practices like Margolles's.

But while Geertz's primary sphere of intervention was in the field of ethnography and social science methodology, where he made a name for himself as an anthropologist, Margolles has made a name for herself as an artist by intervening on the same bodies she studies and those of the museum-goers and gallery visitors who view her work in public exhibitions. She has brought their blood and grey matter to European exhibition spaces, atomizing it and bringing it into direct contact with art world audiences who have breathed, stepped in, and touched the human sacrifices of a trade originating far from their daily experiences. Her work has revealed the connection between these removed publics, global capitalism and the horrors of everyday violence which many so-called first world populations would otherwise ignore. She has also extracted pieces from the bodies of the dead which operate as powerful indexical objects that can be traced back to the violence. The pierced tongue of a drug addicted teenager from a Mexico City ghetto, shattered glass removed from the body of a trafficker – become objects whose meanings are indexed to a particular context and phenomenon, yet at the same time are made to speak about transnational violence between so-called first and third worlds. Margolles' insertion of them into the art scene, a realm marked by wealth and elitism, is a commentary both about the situation of violent death and the invisibility of this violence even as it is inflicted upon bodies of the poor as a result of a global process. Small describes a theoretical perspective from ethnomethodology which assumes "meanings are indexed to particular situations," and study everyday life "as it is experienced... they assume that social reality is both inter-subjective and radically situational, such that the meaning of actions and events can only be explained with the particular set of circumstances in which they occurred."²⁷⁹ Could this definition be applied to the work of Margolles, and many of her contemporaries, who use the indexical object and situation as a unit of study, making her a practitioner of ethnography as well as of art? Or is she just another practitioner of the kind of "quasi" or "pseudo" ethnographic rhetoric in art practices that Hal Foster describes?

²⁷⁹ Small is citing a 1960s work of sociologist Harold Garfinkel, p.18.

In trying to decipher “the aesthetics of collective art practices” from the 1990s onwards, Downey has suggested that like ethnographic methodology and practice, these kinds of art practices have also been judged in art criticism for their “contribution to our understanding of social life (substantive contribution); whether they work aesthetically (aesthetic merit); authorial self-awareness and self-reflexiveness in terms of approach, observations and findings (reflexivity); the effect of the work on the viewer/reader (impact); and the credibility of its account of the so-called ‘real’ (expression of reality) (Richardson cited in Downey 2009). However, Downey notes one key difference in the way artists use ethnographic methods, as the artist often “explor(es) this relationship between authority and authorship, albeit in terms that tend to parody or knowingly discard ‘ethnographic authority’ in the name of ‘artistic authorship’ (Downey 2009, 597). Here there are two clear differences in the way artists use ethnography: as material for artworks rather than academic works, and as a subject to be parodied or critiqued as part of a social authority figure. Innate to the artistic authorship is a kind of critique by intervention. Perhaps this is akin to the strategy behind the kind of gonzo-journalism created by writer-journalist Hunter S. Thompson, an art form he designed by interacting with his subjects, intervening in the realities of their experiences by inserting himself into their worlds and contradicting the objective claims of traditional journalism (McKeen 2009).

Two of the most popular trends in 21st century contemporary art practices have been the use of the indexical object to tell a story when extracted from its context, and the intervention of the artist into one or more social spheres. Artists employing this kind of artistic authorship in the social sphere go much farther back than the 1990s: artist collectives exploring the line between social activism and art, left their mark on many artistic scenes in the 1960s and 70s, with site specific, public, and community-based art. RoseLee Goldberg has argued that interactive practices like performance have always been a part of artistics practices dating much further back even than the sixties, referencing the kind of live sculpture (tableaux), and other rituals and games artists organised as part of practices dating back to the Italian renaissance (Goldberg 1988, 8-9).

There have been many attempts to define ethnography as artistic practice, though without much consensus and still a lot of uncharted territory in the diversity of practices.

American artist and scholar Miwon Kwon has described the genre of socially-engaged art as defined by a change in the positioning of the artist and an understanding of art as not necessarily object-based, as artists went from makers of objects to appropriating the role of “facilitators, educators, coordinators and bureaucrats” (Kwon 2004, 103). She notes that with the centring of the “discursive” in arts practices, during this period, the aesthetic aspect of art was no longer the sole primary focus. British scholar Claire Bishop suggests seeing the history of art through the lens of theatre, rather than through painting (cite p), as a way to better conceptualise the performative nature of participatory art. Bishop has criticised participatory practices as being judged for their ethical rather than aesthetic quality, defending the social value even of artworks even if they exploit the bodies of under-privileged people.

The ethics of ethnography is another point of contention in both fields. Social scientists participate in the communities they are studying, but are rarely accused of intervening radically in their subjects’ lives, behaviours, and bodies. Sociologists sometimes compensate their subjects with a symbolic gift for time spent in interviews, but artists as ethnographers have gone much further – Santiago Sierra has paid a group of sex workers to tattoo a line across their backs, and a migrant worker to live in a box for a week, while Margolles has paid for the hospitalisation of a heroin addict she got to agree to douse himself in human fat; all three actions were central pieces of well-known contemporary artworks.

Social scientists might consider these kinds of overt interventions unethical, or even a risk to the validity of the study. But both artists and social scientists have been accused of treading upon the ethical boundaries and abusing their ethnographic and artistic authority to tell a story that is biased or exploitative. The field of anthropology is credited with the creation of the “other”, while productivist models and their narratives about urban poor have been credited with enforcing (rather than undoing) stereotypes. Policy makers, too,

have arguably inflicted serious levels of violence upon marginalized communities around the globe, often informed by ethnographic authority. In Hal Foster's 1999 seminal text on the use of the social in contemporary art practices, he accuses artists of acting as 'quasi-ethnographers'²⁸⁰, and imitating the shadiest aspects of ethnographic history, 'othering' their participants while falling into the traps of stereotypes of subject and ethnographic authority (all the while ignoring the scrupulous protocols of ethnographic methods).

Foster writes:

Today there is a related paradigm in advanced art on the left: the artist as ethnographer. The object of contestation remains, as least in part, the bourgeois institution of autonomous art, its exclusionary definitions of art, audience, identity. But the subject of association has changed: it is now the cultural and/or ethnic other in whose name the artist often struggles. And yet, despite this shift, basic assumptions with the old productivist model persist in the new quasi-anthropological paradigm. First, there is the assumption that the site of artistic transformation is the site of political transformation, and more, that this site is always located elsewhere, in the field of the other: in the productivist model, with the social other, the exploited proletariat; in the quasi-anthropological model, with the cultural other, the oppressed postcolonial, subaltern, or subcultural. Second, there is the assumption that this other is always *outside*, and more, that this alterity is the primary point of subversion of dominant culture. Third, there is the assumption that if the invoked artist is not perceived as socially and/or culturally other, he or she has but *limited* access to this transformative alterity, and, more, that if he or she is perceived as other, he or she has *automatic* access to it. Taken together, these three assumptions lead to another point of connection with the Benjamin account of the author as producer: the danger, for the artist as ethnographer, of "ideological patronage."

²⁸⁰ Hal Foster's seminal 1999 text, *The Return of the Real* problematises the use of ethnographic methods in arts practices by describing them as superficially treating both social science and their subjects – a trend which has continued yet cannot describe all arts practices incorporating ethnography.

It seems that ethnographic practitioners from anthropology to the arts have been guilty, in varying degrees, of what Edward Said has described as the violence of representation, when he describes the act of “representations (and hence reducing) others, almost always involves violence of some sort to the subject of the representation.” (Mariani and Crary, 94). Certainly, the exhibition of bodies as part of the history of anthropology has involved a level of violence both theoretically and physically as it relates to the concept of the other. Margolles’ exhibition of body parts as socially-conscious art reflects the long history of the exhibition of bodies as social science and quasi-entertainment. Describing how the bodies of people from the Middle East were represented in the World’s fair exhibitions of the 1800s and 1900s, Turkish scholar Zeyneb Celik outlines five roles that non-Western people were limited to in the major exhibitions of the 19th and 20th centuries, encased in the national installations of each country.²⁸¹ The five types represent five tropes or conceptual frames for the exhibition of bodies in the anthropological and social context.²⁸²

Here, within the history of exhibition, there lies a point of contact between the two fields of ethnography in art and ethnography in anthropology, with artists using ethnographic methods to create art that in turn critiques and references the creation of the anthropological, racialised other and its formation in part through the exhibition of the otherised human body. This is not to say that there have been no critiques of these same issues within the fields of anthropology and sociology. Sociologists like Susan Finley have used arts-based methods and the exhibition of scholarly findings in a theatre format, critiquing the traditional audience of ethnography as being limited to academia (Finley

²⁸¹ “1) people as technicians, with a technician acting as part of a machine on display; 2) people as artisans, with an emphasis on tradition and ethnicity as well as the “handmade” qualities of the products; 3) people as curiosities or freaks, with an emphasis on abnormal physiology and behaviour; 4) people as trophies, most typically the conquered displayed by the conquerer in special enclosures; and (5) people as specimens or scientific objects, as subjects of anthropological and ethnographic research” (Çelik, 2000)

²⁸² As discussed in Chapter 1 in relationship to Fusco and Gomez-Peña’s *The Couple in the Cage: A Guatinaui Odyssey* and the tropes of objectification of the non-white body found in the world’s fair exhibitions of people from around the globe, and in the anthropological history of exhibiting bodies as both scientific evidence and freak show, as in the case of Saartjie Baartman, an indigenous South African woman who was purchased by a doctor in the 1780s and exhibited throughout Europe as a freak show called “the hottentot Venus” (Scully and Crais 2009).

1998). These kinds of removed audiences, as well as themes of institutional critique, and the exhibition of bodies will be explored in the next sections.

Background

The following are two relevant case studies on artists working collectively, each from a different perspective on viewing collective urban art. The first case study is from a “star” curator who has become an art world celebrity through curating many of the works and large exhibitions discussed in Part I, and the second from a social anthropologist.

Together, these two views on collectivisms represent a selection of the different kinds of genealogies and readings for the case studies I present in the following chapters, focusing on time and space in the social worlds of the city.

Le Groupe Amos (1990s Kinshasa) and Huit Facettes (1990s Dakar)

Okwui Enwezor presents two images of the “production of social space as artwork” in his regional analysis of contemporary African art and two groups within the region: Groupe Amos from Kinshasa, the capital city of the Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaire), and Huit Facettes in Dakar, capital of Senegal. Enwezor is interested in these two groups as curatorial subjects within the larger narrative on African contemporary art, and the conceptual work they might do, to reveal holes in the narratives of authenticity and crisis, two paradigms often used to view African contemporary art. His argument for comparing these two groups is based upon the assertion that both are direct responses to four factors in their urban and national contexts: 1) the crisis of dictatorship 2) a breaking down of the connection between “state and formal institutions of culture” 3) the “collapse and disappearance of public space and 4) the “crisis and alienation of the labor of the artist working within the bifurcation of social space between the urban and rural” (Enwezor 2007, 235).

With respect to the first context, the crisis of dictatorship, as it relates to social space as artwork, Enwezor places the work from these two African contexts in dialogue with the radical conceptual art of 1960s-80s South America. Citing artists from Brazil like Hélio Oiticica and Cildo Miereles, as well as the Argentinian collective Tucumán Arde, he asserts that these artists responded to dictatorships by “rais[ing] important questions concerning the entire relationship of art to the public sphere and shifted the emphasis from dematerialization to the production of social space.” (Enwezor 2007, 230). In categorising artist groups from two distinct regions of the world as both artistic responses to dictatorship, Enwezor is building upon a highly visible narrative in curatorial studies about Latin American art as political and collective (as discussed earlier in two contrasting currents from the work of Mari Carmen Ramirez and Miguel Angel López). But both Le Groupe Amos and Huit Facettes also share less visible strategies with other artists from the global South. Like los Grupos, who were concerned with the way public space related to the everyday citizen and construction of the urban social, Le Groupe Amos and Huit Facettes treated “the production of a common space and the development of protocols of community as the first condition for the recognition of the sovereign subject.” Citing Achille Mbembe and Janet Roitman’s theorising on the politics of crisis in “Figures of the Subject in Time of Crisis,” Enwezor describes how both groups stepped in to fill the absence of the state in common social space. For Le Groupe Amos, a multi-disciplinary activist collective, this meant producing a range of social projects bilingually, in Lingala, the local vernacular language and French, the national language (local theatre troupes, radio programs, videos, posters, pamphlets, educational workshops, etc.). For Huit Facettes, first and foremost an artist collective, intervening in public discourse meant addressing the widening class divides, widening rural/urban divides and frustrations of the local artistic scene through projects like the Hamdallaye project, an on-going workshop and market exchange between urban artists and a rural village outside the city (244). He observes, “by paying critical attention to the idea of subjectivity Huit Facette works in the interstices of development and empowerment, whereby ‘in the end the participants are able to set up self-sustaining practices as non-

dependant citizens” (245-246). The villagers of Hamdallaye decide with the artists of Huit Facettes on a series of workshops that will build on local skills to learn marketable crafts using sustainable methods, like batik, carving, weaving, embroidery and under-glass painting. Huit Facettes provides materials, facilitates workshops and marketing of the goods in the city. Enwezor contextualises this strategy, by placing it within the larger context of a debate between the new aesthetic of invention and what he sees as a contrasting aesthetic of the recycled. He sees an increased visibility of the latter aesthetic, which he traces to NGOs and their privilege in of this as an authentic African craft. In his words this aesthetic is “the spectacle and excess of Tokunbo culture, [borrowing a Yoruban slang for a secondhand market], whereby discarded and semifunctional technological objects and detritus of the West are recalibrated for the African market.” (246)

Even as he examines the relationship of the trope of crisis to the art actions of local collectives, Enwezor also encourages “a critique of crisis as always the logical outcome of the neo-colonial transformation of the modern African state.” (Enwezor 2007, 234). Perhaps because of his position as a “star” curator in the West who is concerned with what he considers by his own definition, “art from elsewhere”, Enwezor is also preoccupied with placing both African contemporary art and the work of these two collectives within a larger narrative that relates to ideas about authenticity and the work of art in Europe (the ready-made, etc). Periods of crisis (and the social turmoil and political uncertainty they can entail), he observes, is often the backdrop setting against which artist collectives emerge, (citing as predecessors the Paris Commune of the 1860s, the socialist collectives of the Russian Revolution in 1917, Dada and the Situationist International). Within this larger discussion of collectives and crisis, Enwezor proposes two new, somewhat vague categories for conceptualising collective “formations and practices”. The first category Enwezor says is not as common in collective practices in the 2000s, he describes it as “permanent, fixed” and “sustained” groupings of artists, in which the group is the author (and not the individual). He does not lend a name to this category. The second category he calls a “networked” collective, by his definition the

more common contemporary practice of the two, and he contrasts its qualities as “flexible” “non-permanent affiliation”, a kind of collaboration that is project-based. The former he categorises as older, and the latter as newer, though he does not say outright how these categories might relate to his two case studies of African collectives. Upon closer examination, it seems that most groups, even the ones described by Enwezor, fit both and neither definition. Huit Facettes, by Enwezor’s description, is defined by a series of ongoing, long term projects which seem to be authored collectively. Le Groupe Amos is project-based, flexible yet sustained.

Creative Reckonings (Cairo 1990s)

In one of the few ethnographies dedicated to an urban contemporary art scene in the global South, American anthropologist Jessica Winegar debunks many Eurocentric assumptions about any kind of universal meaning of what it means to be a contemporary artist, revealing many of the larger forces artists must come to terms with in the process of becoming both urban citizen and artist (or “arts interlocuters” as she calls them). She tells the story of national processes, of modernism and of the politics of everyday life in Cairo through the stories of its artists, whose actions she conceptualises as “creatively reckoning” with “the histories of ancient Egypt, European modernism, anti-colonial nationalism, and state socialism-all in the context of a growing neoliberal economy marked by American global dominance.” (Winegar 2006, 21). Explaining her use of this term to get at the agency of artists within these larger processes, she writes:

The major thrust of this book is to explore how they created meaning and value in a period of social, economic, and political transformation through what I call their “reckoning” with genealogies of the modern... If we think of Egyptian arts interlocuters as navigating their way through the major social transformations of post-Cold War Egypt by creatively calculating their positions and dealing with the exigencies and problematics put forward by various genealogies of the modern, we arrive at a much more accurate and

dynamic understanding of postcolonial cultural production than that usually found in Western art writing.

Most important, the concept of reckoning has agentic and processual qualities. It therefore emphasizes Egyptian arts interlocutors' active, creative, and ongoing engagement with the many different values, forms, ideologies, and histories associated with the modern. It therefore works against the curatorial moves that accuse Egyptians of imitating Western artists. And it resists the totalizing aspects of the "progress" narrative to which, it is claimed by everyone from Western curators to the World Bank and the U.S. government, Egyptians must eventually submit (Winegar 2006, 6).

In her 377 page work on the 1990s Egyptian art scene, Winegar not only meaningfully puts into question the curatorial and art historical framings of Egyptian art and artists, she also gets at the heart of the national and transnational currents (and counter-currents) which artists are in a unique position to understand and address; a phenomenon embedded in both collective and individual artworks, as well as in everyday life. Winegar also challenges the assumption that artists are usually bohemian outsiders in any given city, demonstrating how many contemporary artists in Cairo do not fit this stereotype. A modern artist, she writes, could be both a "free-thinking individual" and "member of mainstream society" without need for the oppositional "rebel artist" narrative so common to capitalist, Euro-American and European artists of the same period (Winegar, 47).

In narrating the role of the state and its interactions with different generations of Egyptian artists, she complicates the local gallerist assumptions that the state always necessarily endorsed an elder generation of artists as the official representatives of national image, and the private galleries were the primary domain of the younger generation of artists who came of age in the 1990s. Instead, she shows how artists from both generations navigated collaborations and funding from both the state and foreign gallerists, and their sometimes opposing scripts for what Egyptian art should look like and express. In telling this story she pinpoints the neo-colonialist actions and beliefs of

foreign private gallerists and NGOs, who have a tight hold on much of the contemporary art scene to this day.

Like Enwezor, Winegar brings her analysis of artist groups into dialogue with Latin American art and the known aspects of its interaction in the social sphere, comparing the concerns of Egyptian artists with local publics to those of Latin American artists. She cites Latin American cultural theorist Nestor Garcia Canclini's reading of modernization projects embedded in artworks and art actions from Latin America, to argue against the reading of Egyptian modernism as "incomplete" or "contradictory" (as Canclini argues in his discussion of Latin American modernisms) (Winegar 2006, 48).

While Winegar does not go into great detail on contemporary artist collectives in Cairo, she does examine the kind of collective work artists engaged in with exhibitions, events, and education. She presents some findings on Egyptian artist collectives of the 1940s and 1950s, placing them within a genealogy of Egyptian art and an era in which collectivism in the arts was used to explore the tradition/modernity axis, and within in that issues like Pan-Arab nationalism in the Nasser era, or the incorporation of Islamic calligraphy into modern art. One example is the Group of Art and Life, whose mission was to connect art with the local milieu, including craft and spirituality. Another organisation, from the 1990s, was Asala Collective for Heritage Arts and Contemporary Arts, also employed the strategy of combining knowledges from local art traditions with those from foreign art traditions, mainly modernism from Europe.

Conclusion

These are by no means the only studies relevant to this ethnography, but they are some of the few on collectivism that are significant to my research design and analysis, for their theoretical mappings and framing of urban collective work by contemporary artists. They demonstrate applications of themes, as well as gaps in theorising around collectivism (on

public space, the street, the trope of crisis, neo-colonialism in the art world, a gendered lens, the presence or absence of the state, and the idea of modernisation and Latin American cultural theory (and conceptual art) as reference point for the global South). Following Winegar's periodising of artist collectives within the social, political and cultural politics of the national and transnational, I propose to view the artist groups in this ethnography, in a post-911 era, through two overlapping lenses: Sayak Valencia's idea of the era of "gore capitalism" (Valencia 2012) and the local aesthetics of the everyday that persist even in spite of crisis, and violence.

Gregory Sholette and Blake Stimson also propose theorising about post 9-11 collectivism through a lens similar to gore capitalism – what they call "the spectre of a new collectivism" that haunts capitalism's globalisation (Valencia 2012). "The first of these new, airy forms of collectivism of public opinion rising and falling on the Arab street," they write, in a much critiqued phrase, seeking to place art collectivism within the larger image of scripts of collectivism from a range of popular sources, "or ricocheting across Al Jazeera's or Al Qaida's networks or whispering in this or that secret, self-isolated cell gathered together in a cave in the Pakistani countryside, or in an apartment in metro Toronto." (Sholette and Stimpson 2007, 1). While their pairing of the respected international news agency Al Jazeera with a terrorist organisation is very problematic, Stimson and Sholette rightly point out three collective organisations which are important to any analysis on collectivism from this period, marked by narratives and networks from global media, terrorism and activism. These three are intertwined with the story of global capitalism and the violence it inflicts on its subjects (such as the phenomenon of Narco-violence), as Sayak Valencia brings to our attention in her naming of this period as marked by "capitalismo gore" or gore capitalism. Borrowing from the language of B-grade terror cinema and the baroque monsters of Spanish literature, she describes the problematics of capitalism in its current, neo-colonialist phase:

Al hablar de capitalismo gore nos referimos a una transvaloración de valores y de prácticas que se llevan a cabo (de forma más visible) en los territorios fronterizos, donde es pertinente hacerse la siguiente pregunta: "¿Qué formas convergentes de estrategia están desarrollando los subalternos —marginalizados— [...] bajo las fuerzas transnacionalizadoras del Primer Mundo?"

(Sandoval 2004, 81). *Desafortunadamente, muchas de las estrategias para hacer frente al Primer Mundo o acercase a él, son formas ultraviolentas para hacerse de capital: prácticas gore.*²⁸³
(Valencia 2012).²⁸⁴

Valencia's concept displays a choice in the naming of violence and the naming of an era. Instead of describing our current era as an era of global hegemony (as it is often considered), she invents a term to express the connections between South and North, through her critique of global capitalism. Gore capitalism represents a fissure in the concept of the global, a revealing of the inter-connectedness of post colonial violence and late capitalism. Her theory connects the colonial imagination with neoliberal capitalist practices between so-called 1st and 3rd worlds. This is a useful theoretical framework for the following case studies, placing them in an era of post 9-11 capitalist crisis, and examining the everyday aesthetics of four cities that ethnographic methods can shed light upon, illuminating the kind of processes of territorialisations that are in constant flux.

The following ethnographies will look at how and why artist groups in four scenes are informed by local and international participation in art worlds and social worlds.

²⁸³ "Speaking of gore capitalism we refer to a revaluation of values and practices that are carried out (most visible form) in border areas, where it is relevant to ask the question: "What converging forms of strategy are developing the subalterns -the marginalized- [...] under the transnational forces of the First World?" (Sandoval 2004, 81). Unfortunately, many of the strategies for dealing with the First World or even approaching it are ultra-violent ways of making capital: gore practices." (author's translation).

²⁸⁴ Valencia's larger description describes how gore capitalism is both an inversion and inevitable piece of the current economic hegemony: "*Proponemos el término capitalismo gore como la reinterpretación dada a la economía hegemónica y global en los espacios (geográficamente) fronterizos y/o precarizados económicamente. Tomamos el término gore de un género cinematográfico que hace referencia a la violencia extrema y tajante. Entonces, con capitalismo gore nos referimos al derramamiento de sangre explícito e injustificado (como precio a pagar por el Tercer Mundo que se aferra a seguir las lógicas del capitalismo, cada vez más exigentes), al altísimo porcentaje de vísceras y desmembramientos, frecuentemente mezclados con el crimen organizado, la división binaria del género y los usos predatorios de los cuerpos, todo esto por medio de la violencia más explícita como herramienta de necroempoderamiento.*" (Valencia 2012). "We propose the term capitalism gore as the reinterpretation given to the hegemonic and global economy in the spaces (geographically) border and / or economically precarious. We take the term gore from a film genre that refers to extreme and sharp violence. With gore capitalism, then, we refer to the explicit and unjustified bloodshed (as a price to pay for the Third World that clings to the increasingly demanding logic of capitalism), to the very high percentage of viscera and dismemberment, often mixed with organized crime, the binary division of gender, and the predatory uses of bodies, all of this facilitated through the most explicit violence used as a tool of necro-empowerment." (author's translation).

Chapter 5

A Typology of Collective Practices & Resistance

Informal Infrastructures

In the beginning it was Hala El Khoussy and Heba Farid who had the initial idea to start a space for photography and video, that concentrates on image production and makes use of people's accumulated knowledge. We all had some relationship to photography in one way or another... as a photojournalist, or as an artist who uses photography in different ways, or as a collector of photography, a publisher of books.

You don't have so many art institutions here in Cairo. You can say its basically between state bodies (the school of art, the museum of art, [art] shows that are organized by the palace of art which is a part of the ministry of culture)... next to that you have commercial galleries, that have worked traditionally in painting and things more like traditional forms of art: painting, sculpture things they can sell. And then you have just two or three galleries interested in more experimental work, alongside more traditional forms... more open to showing work that wouldn't necessarily sell. And then Townhouse was a big addition to the scene when it started. It was a not-for-profit space and it was interested in different forms. It's not just a gallery, it's also interested in doing workshops, having an educational dimension, all of this. [But] there was still a lack of places, so this was why there was the thought of starting another space that was started by artists. Maybe [we] understand in a more intimate way what's missing, what's needed, and maybe [we] can provide information and share experiences.

--Maha Maamoun, a founding member the Contemporary Image Collective (CIC)

The social-scenic map made visible by Maamoun's description of the landscape of the Cairene art group reveal two things. Firstly, her rendering of an artist group is not the precarious, utopian commodity so favored by the art-institution and biennials looking to sell the avant-garde – instead, Maamoun's kind of artist group is an expert service provider that meets a need not understood by the state or private sector. Secondly, the kind of organization she describes is more like a para-institution, an artist group that acts in collaboration with other individual and collective members of the art scene; a space that mirrors and critiques the institutions of the art scene, while not actually employing a bureaucratic or anti-individual stance.

Maamoun voices an image of an artist group that works as a cooperative, as a structure that can reveal the blindspots and gaps in the Cairene art scene that other art spaces and institutions have failed to address, each with their agendas/needs seemingly far from the agendas and needs of artists producing work. The idea that artistic development and genius is fed by the need to experiment, to make artwork that won't necessarily sell (or not calculated for a market) is an old and universal concept, yet one that exists in opposition to the market and institution of art. The contradiction in the 21st century art world is that biennials, museums, and white cube European and American blue chip galleries have a preference for contemporary artists who are famous for making artwork that is classified as contemporary as opposed to commercial, and not easily sellable – conceptual, video, performance, social practice. These kinds of works buy artists cultural capital that can be exchanged for international residencies, museum exhibitions, biennials and international gallery representation – none of which by definition produce a livable wage, but all of which have the possibility to translate to a higher market value attached to the artist, and thus, the possibility to bring in actual wealth. A curious fact of this relationship between contemporary artist, new genres of non-sellable work and market value is that after achieving fame, many renowned contemporary artists produce work in traditional formats, especially painting and small scale sculpture, that fetches high prices in the international market. This work is highly sellable, but not because the artist is a master-painter or master-sculptor (as the old masters were), but because their reputation as a contemporary artist is attached to the object that gains value only once introduced into the international market by an artist superstar whose reputation is built conceptually rather than through mastery of craft.²⁸⁵

Maamoun illuminates the possibility an artist group can offer in helping artists manage the contradictions of this landscape of the local arts infrastructure, as the missing piece that understands the needs and context (city, artists, art scene) better than any of the other

²⁸⁵ Francis Alys has publically discussed this phenomenon when he describes the small scale oil paintings he transports in his backpack to sell for large amounts in foreign lands outside his adopted country of Mexico (Alÿs 2010).

components of the scene (galleries, institutions, state entities). As Maamoun intimates, an artist group can do this because it is started by the same community that it serves, and by the core group of people that produce and constitute the art scene: artists.²⁸⁶ But it also hints at a larger role the artist group can play in the history of the art scene when viewed as part of a geneology of collectives. Though it does not always exist as consistently as the schools and museums of the local art institutions, it is a persistent structure that flows and ebbs, coming through strongly into the spotlight at times while falling back into the shadows at other times, as evidenced with the 1940s Cairene group *Art et Liberté* and its successors. Maamoun describes witnessing the blooming of an infrastructure created not by institutions but by artists of her generation in the Cairo of the 2000s:

In 2005, somehow it was a point where a lot of people just decided to start things. Artists started getting involved in starting places, institutions. Suddenly there was kind of this energy, and this realization... people just felt compelled to start something. I think it's still happening but at that time a lot of people felt they had to start institutions... like CIC, AKAF, Studio Emad Eddin. And now maybe people are starting projects... The kind of institutions that we started require a lot of fundraising and administration - having a fixed place, a staff, and this kind of profile. (Interview with author).

CIC was founded to foster a place of experimentation, of artistic role play, where genres and roles could be interchanged and artists had authority over the resources, spaces, and exhibition opportunities that were offered to fellow artists. Because of their proximity to artistic production, they could understand and assess “more intimately” the kind of space that was needed to foster a growing art scene, which would need creative capital as much as it would need monetary capital. But even along with these utopic ideals, Maamoun described the limits of creative expression within a group space as directly corresponding to the amount of free time required to found an artist group with such ambitions.²⁸⁷ This

²⁸⁶ This is a basic principal of community organizing, though it is often not respected. For an in-depth discussion of how service organizations can actually do more harm than helping their constituents when they do not follow this fundamental rule of being founded and governed by people who also receive their services, see *Normal Life: Administrative violence, critical trans politics, and the limits of law* (2011) by US legal scholar Dean Spade.

²⁸⁷ Maamoun explains, “It was a diverse group of people who had a camera in common, somehow you can say that. But more importantly it was group of people who were willing to give this kind of time, to really volunteer this kind of time to starting a place. Because of course it took an immense amount of time and

calls attention to the idea that utopic endeavors are always shaped by the limits of what is possible and by the ghosts of those voices who are not included in the building of utopic enterprises, however small or big. The artist collaborators needed to have enough time, energy, and personal funding to build and sustain their own enterprise, to volunteer thousands of hours into building this new world of a para-institution without the living wage of an institution – so how to do this while staying alive, while attending to life outside of art? Perhaps the early projects of a group can survive without funding, purely through the efforts of volunteering or as a hobby, but to last as a group in the spotlight, money is always eventually sought after. And this is where things get complicated.

This is the question all artist groups face eventually, no matter their economic, geographic, or cultural position. Even the groups started by the independently wealthy or middle class artists (as were the vast majority of artist groups I encountered in my research), needed to solve this problem in order to survive as a collective entity. Ahmed Al Shaer, a contemporary of Maamoun and frequent collaborator with artist groups in the same scene and generation, described the reasons for ties artist groups have with institutions in the local scene of Cairo:

C.I.C. started as a part of Townhouse,²⁸⁸ and I think it still is affiliated, because the people who manage it, most of them worked in Townhouse before. Townhouse here is a big spider.²⁸⁹

energy to start something like this. So there were interesting people who would've been great to be on the board, but not everyone has the time to put into something like this." (Interview with Author).

²⁸⁸ This slight contradiction denotes the strong affiliation between CIC and Townhouse, so strong that many arts and culture workers in the scene associated these two entities as sharing funds, staff, projects like the PhotoCairo exhibition, artistic missions and sensitivities – so much so that many described CIC as a branch of Townhouse, even though CIC formally describes itself as an independent artist-run and founded initiative. This strong alliance perceived as allegiance is evidenced in the discrepancy between the narratives told by El Shaer and Maamoun about CIC starting as an independent entity by Heba Farid and Hala El Khoussy, or as a subsidiary of Townhouse.

²⁸⁹ He continued, "And also some independent organisations now, they have now funded, or have events funded by Townhouse. Like what happen with Medrar. When Medrar want funding, ok, Ford Foundation say to them for example, everything is under Townhouse, so its controlling the funding and the art spaces. Medrar is independent, but day by day you want some money to continue. You want technical stuff, you want print stuff, to organise shows. They have fund first, from Holland or I think something like that. But after that finished, they want another one. So Townhouse put them in the tree. But Townhouse, they make big control I think." Interview with author, December, 2010.

When El Shaer describes Townhouse as a big spider exerting control over the other projects in its web through providing funding, he is describing a mechanism through which artistic production and autonomous collectivity become influenced by the art system. If they did not already look to foreign art spaces for validation, it is at this moment when artists and their collective formations begin to rely upon these representatives of the global art-institution for funding that they enter the system of the global art world; a circuit that is said to exert control and behavior modification on to every less powerful expression that enters into its tree.

Once in the tree controlled by Townhouse, El Shaer describes how the future of sustained exhibitions and projects become more possible for groups like Medrar and CIC – and one of their primary functions is to hold exhibitions that they felt were not represented by or allowed in other spaces. This kind of collectivism functions around the need of artists who want to exhibit, think, and develop their individual practices together as members in a collaborative unit with a common goal of producing a new branch of work; it follows the work of exhibition collectives in contemporary art like Gutai, which created dozens of exhibitions in Japan between 1954 and 1972, in their own exhibition space, the Gutai Pinacotheca, outdoors and on various stages in their city. Gutai has been categorized by Japanese Reiko Tomii as “ultimately an enterprise of its charismatic leader Yoshihara Jiro, the esteemed abstract painter and a senior member of the art world” who played the role of mentor, teacher, and innovator in the tradition of “exhibition collectivism.” (Tomii 2007, 45). Jiro encouraged the members of Gutai to follow a mission of breaking free from the constraints of traditional art methodologies, and trying to make work that had never before existed (Tomii 2007, 45-47). Like Gutai, Medrar and CIC were motivated by pursuing the dream of creating something never created before.²⁹⁰ But instead of relying upon an individual master artist with wealth and power to fund their autonomous creative projects, Medrar and CIC relied upon re-granting from foreign institutions with

²⁹⁰ Medrar embraced new initiatives like creating one of the first native-language art appreciation and criticism in Cairo with Medrar TV and workshops to develop local art critics, as well as pioneering new technologies in the art world. CIC aspired to be the first interdisciplinary photographic centre in Cairo, as Maamoun described.

wealth and power like Townhouse (a phenomenon characteristic of many of their peers around the world).

Sometimes artist groups have been categorized by their structural formations methodologies; the kinds of collectivity they practice and the way they are organized. Some of these methodologies repeat over time and space, the most common being: collective, collaborative, cooperative structures. To these methodologies, Reiko Tomii Like Gutai, the CIC is collaborative in nature and focuses on artist-centred exploratory exhibitions around the theme of doing something absent from their scene. But unlike Gutai, CIC was started by a collective led by two women as the start of their artistic careers. In Cairo, this kind of exhibition collectivism, a term proposed by Japanese art historian Reiko Tomii, was a widespread element in the Cairene scene of 2010, but most often it was also combined with a strong social component: either through educational workshops for the general non-arts public or through the presence of a social practice engrained in the mission. In the following chart²⁹¹ of the Cairene art world as described by Maamoun and her peers, the lines between public and private discourse demonstrate how funding, connections, and the ties Maamoun and El Shaer describe shape interactions with local and international publics. The names in red represent the artist groups Maamoun describes as central to the scene; each has its own kind of collectivism and its own way of reaching out to the public through education or social projects.

²⁹¹ This chart is based upon interviews conducted in 2010, research and ethnographic observations.

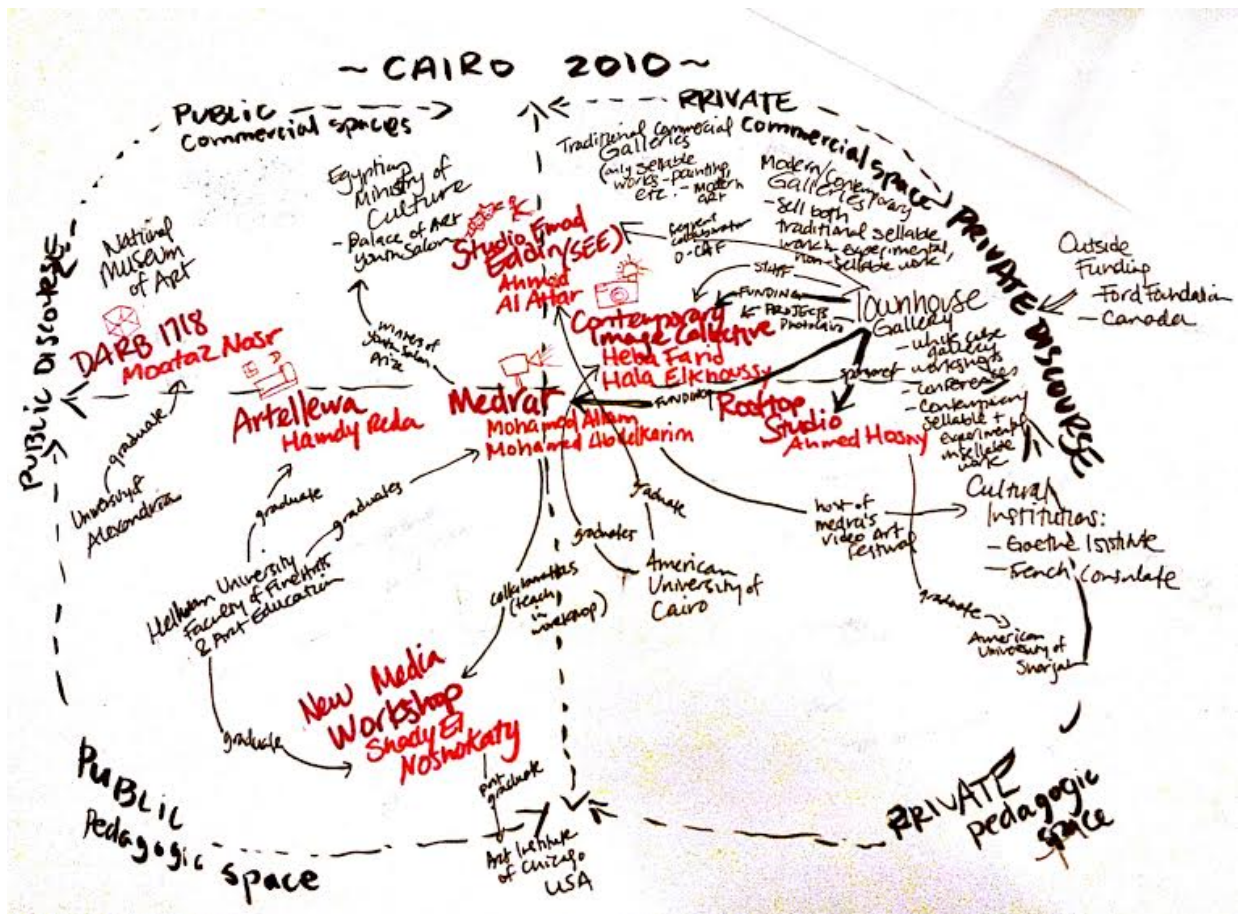


Image 5a: Map of Artist Groups in Cairo, 2010.

The map that emerges from Maamoun's testimony outlines the parts that also make up the collective Cairo art world in 2010, as an urban terrain where various sectors (public/private/commercial/national/foreign) and zones converge, between art world and the larger public arena of the city. Each sector beholds art from a different perspective, each with its own mode of address in which artists, artworks, publics and arts workers (curators, educators, gallerists, state officials, collectors) are constituted in their relationship to each other. The dividing lines between private and public sectors represent the ejes or superhighways of contrasting paradigms, differences of perspective. Inserting CIC into it's own niche in the ecology of this world, Maamoun places the role of the artist group in the centre of this conceptual map, working between branches of both public and private entities in the local art world to fill the gap left by organizations that work with artists but do not know or cater to their needs – private galleries (foreign and

local, traditional and experimental), museum spaces, government-funded salons and contests, cultural centres of foreign diplomacy. This is a gap also identified by arts and cultural workers in other local scenes, like that of Beirut. Janine Rubeiz, who founded and ran the cultural space Dar el Fan in Beirut from 1967 to 1975, describes the need for non-institutional artist-led spaces that are anchored in local politics by native practitioners who take an active, perhaps non-hierarchical role in creating the same art scene they serve: “The programs of the cultural centres attached to diplomatic missions were designed by ministries far flung abroad, they did not correspond to our yearnings. And the Lebanese government did not seem to have regard for culture and related fields, so the private sector took the role of the public sector.” (Keshnirshekan 139-140).²⁹²

Like Maamoun’s description of the Cairene 2000s art scene, the scene Rubeiz paints reveals a divide between sectors, desires, motives and missions – with artists on one side and the state and private entities on another side. Though Dar el Fan and CIC had different missions and artistic focuses, both are models of cooperative collectivism designed as a kind of artist service agency, to provide creative and infrastructural support for the local scene by accurately reading/perceiving local desires and needs in order to carry out this kind of work (something that can only be done from close proximity to the scene and non-hierarchical direct involvement/participation). If the local cultural centres led by foreigners and ex-pats were so detached from the desires of the local artists that they could not meet the needs of artists in some parts of global south of 70s, by the 1990s in other parts of the global South these same entities had become a mechanism for

²⁹² In poetic text, Rubeiz describes the formation of an artist-led space in 1960s Beirut: “The sixties witnessed an extraordinary vitality in the realm of culture in Lebanon. Lebanese intellectuals debated passionately ideologies and the state of the world at large, just as artists, particularly in theatre and the visual arts, were in their turn engaged in the various theories of practice that animated their worlds. We used to meet in cafés and felt the need for a meeting place where we would feel at home. The programs of the cultural centres attached to diplomatic missions were designed by ministries far flung abroad, they did not correspond to our yearnings. And the Lebanese government did not seem to have regard for culture and related fields, so the private sector took the role of the public sector. A growing number of friends, artists and intellectuals joined our group. We decided we absolutely had to create a cultural center. So we created Dar el-Fan, a limited shareholding company, with a capital worth of 50,000 Lebanese Pounds (LP), divided over 1,000 shares, each worth 50 L. The shares sold very quickly: Writers, poets, professors, philosophers, actors, film directors, singers and dancers rushed to buy. There was only one condition, namely that no individual could win more than 10 shares to guarantee an equitable participation and that no shareholders could wield influence by that virtue.” (ibid).

control, engraining themselves in the patronage systems and export of art as product. Artist Natalia Dominguez of Colectivo Artificio described a similar phenomenon in San Salvador of the 2000s, where cultural centres attached to the Spanish and French ministries of culture and embassies acted as what she called a filter (*un filtro*). Filtering out which local art and artists would enter into the global art scene centred in Europe, they evaluated local work through competitions, awards, workshops, and even exhibitions that would travel to places like Madrid. “Y somos muchos,” she described, “hueseando al mismo sitio, que son muy pocos, mientras el centro actua como un filtro.”²⁹³

The artist groups and artist initiatives of Cairo 2010, marked in red and described by Maamoun as an alternative institutional structure, represent what I define as an echo of an informal infrastructure, because it has been written out of the large narratives of art history, even though it holds up a mirror to the infrastructure of the art world and of the city. The remnants of this history of artist groups and artist initiatives of the past are beginning to be recovered by new historical voices, as explored in Chapter 1 of this thesis. Isolated cases that seem to pop up here and there under the viewing glass of revisionist historians give us an idea of the forgotten or ignored infrastructures of art history in the South.

The importance of the artist group in contemporary art

This thesis presents a case for the hypothesis that these ghost infrastructures are much larger, much more present and alive than imagined by a Eurocentric version of history that still cares more about large narratives and artists with large narratives – but cannot fathom nor categorize the multiplicity of the ghost-like informal structures of artist groups and initiatives that are ever-occurring.

²⁹³ “There are many of us “hueseando” [Salvadoran term for the act of being opportunist, often at the expense of others] around the same sources of funding, which are very few, while the center acts as a filter.” (Author’s translation).

The artist group exists as a unit in time and space, one that is coded with the social, the historical, and also the spatial; its position in the capital city at the heart of the machinery of national reproduction, makes it a latitudinal/longitudinal, central/marginal keystone to what Edward Soja described as “Thirdspace”, a concept developed from bell hooks’ “the margin as a place of radical possibility.”²⁹⁴ I present the following cases as evidence of the widespread ghost infrastructures of artist collectivism from four cities embedded very different contexts across the South. In the order that I met each group, they are as follows:

²⁹⁴ This unit could yield further insights into the social structures of capital cities through a deeper urban studies analysis of the artist group with urban social geographic terms such as heterotopic space, counter-sites, and hybrid borderlands (Knox and Pinch, 314-344).

San Salvador	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Colectivo Artificio, 2008-9 [6 interviews, 1 focus group, participant observation, map] • La Fabri-K, 2009-present [3 interviews, map] • Adobe, 2002-07 [5 interviews, participant observation, map] • Colectivo Urbano,* 2009-2012 [5 interviews, 2 focus groups, participant observation, map] • Tripode Audiovisual, 2008-present [2 interviews, participant observation, map]
Mexico City	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Laboratorio Curatorial 060, 2004-2012 [3 interviews, map] • Rotatorio, 2008-9 [2 interviews, participant observation] • La Lleca, 2004-present [4 interviews, participant observation, map] • Teatro Ojo, 2003-present [2 focus group interviews] • Satanismo Crítico, 2007 [2 interviews, participant observation]
Beirut	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jadmur Collective*, 2008-2012, [3 interviews, participant observation] • 98 Weeks Research Project, 2006-present [1 interview, participant observation] • Stereotipo (a project by PenguinCube), 2005-2010 [1 interview] • Arab Image Foundation, 1997-present [2 interviews, participant observation]
Cairo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medrar, 2005-present [2 interviews] • Rooftop Studi, 2007-10 [2 interviews, participant observation] • Contemporary Image Collective, 2004-present [1 interview, participant observation] • Studio Emad Eddin Foundation, 2005-present [participant observation] • New Media Workshop, 2000 -present [3 interviews, participant observation]

After each group name, the years during which the group was most active is listed, followed by the kind of research I conducted with each. Groups with which I was able to share a living space and observe in day to day actions over periods of two weeks to four months are marked with an asterisk. The lengths of activity ranged from just under a year to eighteen years; three have ended completely, another five have been dormant for the past few years but have not formally disbanded, and eight are still going strong as active groups. Some have gone through dramatic changes, from an informal group of friends to a formalized organization structure and then to a foundation with staff.

This may seem like an obvious fact that artist groups exist almost everywhere, often bringing institutional critique to the spheres in which they operate, the kind of critique of social reality explored by French social philosopher Henri Lefebvre in his analysis of urbanism and the contradictions of the everyday when compared to large narratives about the global and its flows. Certainly, more and more historical evidence like the work of Bahmoun and Seggerman (explored in Chapter 1) is pointing to the idea that artist groups and collective practices have always existed as integral, though under-represented elements behind the changing tides of world art history. There are most likely artist groups contributing actively to these histories as I write this, going through cycles of birth, life and death in almost every capital city of the South. However, contrary to these everyday truisms, there is much evidence that these practices exist mostly in the shadows when it comes to art history and the art institution, they are rarely considered a necessary element of the spacio-temporal study of cities. But it is precisely because these are practices embedded in the fabric of everyday city life and the international network of the larger art world, that they are necessarily informed by their context. Like most art, they also necessarily reflect the changes in the social and cultural worlds in which they are conceived, shaped by a shifting political economy in each site. The global art-institution is constantly trying to consume, categorize and commodify these ghost infrastructures but compared to the large number of collective projects going on at any given time, this has not always been possible. Perhaps this is because of the huge numbers or seemingly endlessly diverse forms of practice that this history remains in the shadows and resists consumption into the so-called 'desiring machine' of the art-institution.

Certainly, the seemingly autonomous zones of artist groups from the global South have been incorporated into recent historical discourses. They are often presented as incarnates of the perceived cultural tropes of whatever region of the South they are asked to represent -- as precarious structures of anarchy, stemming from a crisis zone, fetishized as resource-poor poverty porn compared to the wealth of the north, incapable of producing its own curators but offering pretty good imitations of those from the North. At

best, art from places like Latin America is fitted into the type of conceptualism heroicized for its ideological side, but ultimately limited to a system of classification (as all historical truisms limit).

Though artist groups from Souths of the past have been recognized as part of the larger national image of local art histories, rarely have they been studied as their own unit with sociological significance or within their own geneology of regional collective expressions. In the award-winning book on collective artistic practice from 1945 to the early 2000s, *Collectivism After Modernism: The Art of Social Imagination after 1945* (2007), the range of case studies crosses the globe, yet no examples of artist groups from the Arab world are included, nor any from Central or South America. Instead, groups from Mexico, Senegal, The Democratic Republic of Congo and Cuba, are envisioned by the authors through the lens of European art history and art theories; while the editors understand the workings of artistic collectivity through the backdrop of the larger cold war struggle, described as the difference between the individualist and the collectivist nation. To speak about the collectivism of mass consumer culture, Stimson and Sholette adopt the Cold War periodization as the dominant thread for the backdrop between the varied case studies of their book.²⁹⁵ Following a similar pattern of examining socially engaged and collective artist practices from the South along with cases from the North, in *Artificial Hells* (2012), Claire Bishop describes her “Western European perspective” as envisioning a return to the social engagement of art that rose up across the globe, and can be understood through three dates: the 1917 European historic avant-garde, the ‘neo’ avant-garde that produced the historical moment of 1968, and the fall of communism in 1989. Bishop sees these as equally important to both the artistic movements in the North and in the South, although she provides a

²⁹⁵ The authors repeatedly refer to the importance of this periodization in the preface and introduction, with universal statements like “Put simply, modernist collectivism stopped making sense after the war and is only now coming back into view but often as a half-materialized specter in denial of its own past.”(xv) “Between 1945 and 1989 culture took on a definite political heft in the undeclared war between capitalism and socialism,” they write on page 9 and “The collectivist dream darkened immediately following the Second World War,” on p.7.

much more detailed and nuanced background for the politics and culture of the former. She divides her examination of socially engaged art into two chapters on European collective art movements in the early 1900s and four chapters that examine “post-war forms of social participation under four disparate ideological contexts” (4). Both Bishop and Stimson and Sholette feature Latin American collective movements and socially-engaged artistic practices predominantly in their books, but choose to focus on Cold War periodization and local European & North American politics -- while failing to discuss critical events that shaped the political and economic landscape between the three regions, like, for example, the 1989 Washington Consensus, a neoliberal project of the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the US Treasury that was a “list of measures for economic reform that presented itself as the ‘best’ programme to face the crisis and ‘underdevelopment’ of Latin America, among which were liberalization of trade and investment, deregulation and a general withdrawal of the state from economic matters.” (López 2010, footnote 16). The question remains, why include Latin American examples in studies that locate their perspective in local and international Euro-centric & US-centric perspectives without critically engaging with political and social history that undoubtedly affected all three regions and the context of art-making in the latter?

This trend of reading collectives, artists and even movements from the South through a periodization based upon international events over regional, national or even local events is another strand of Eurocentrism and a common mistake by art Northern historians who turn their gaze to the South. American art historian Edward J. McCaughan recognizes this distortion as part of hegemonic historical narrative that may not provide the most meaningful interpretation for the dramatic transformations that took place across much of the globe outside the North during the past fifty-some years:

Intense waves of revolution and counterrevolution in Latin America, Africa, Asia, and the Middle East rolled across the globe throughout the 1960s, ‘70s, and 80s. The dominant

discourse of core Western states frequently presented these phenomena as part of an epic struggle between two opposing visions of citizenship: the capitalist West's promise of freedom and democracy versus the communist East's nightmare of enslavement and dictatorship. Activist artists involved in Mexican and Chicano movements of the era countered this Cold War interpretation with a North-South vision of international solidarity among oppressed citizens of the Third World against U.S. imperialism, capitalism, and fascism. (McCaughan 2012, 46)

The Mexican and Chicano movements McCaughan writes of featured many formations of artist groups as central to the creation of political aesthetics and social change; groups like ARCO, No Grupo, Proceso Pentagono, and others that made up the 1970s-80s Grupos movement in Mexico. McCaughan describes how these aesthetic practices from the South provide evidence that the grand narratives of Cold-War periodization used in art history are inaccurate when applied universally. In 2012, Klara Kemp-Welch and Cristine Freire provided a similar thesis and much supporting evidence in their essay "Artists Networks in Latin America and Eastern Europe".²⁹⁶ By examining the often over-looked networks of artist in these two regions during the time the Cold War took place, the authors were able to demonstrate how transnational artistic practices provide an alternative narrative of connection and affiliation (in the same spirit as the solidarity of the third world McCaughan describes) rather than the supposed 'polarization' that the Cold War produced between East and West. They write of the possibility of 'scrambling' these large historical narratives through studies that "recover" invisible art practices from the shadows – but also caution against the rapid commodification of 'marginalized' artistic practices by an art-institution that is waiting to devour these as part of a coveted avant-garde (In 2015, an exhibition on

²⁹⁶ In the fall of 2015, *Transmissions: Art in Eastern Europe and Latin America, 1960–1980* was organized by Stuart Comer, Chief Curator, Department of Media and Performance Art at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, which described the exhibition as coming from a museum research initiative that was designed for "challenging established art-historical narratives in the West and frameworks dictated by the Cold War" in an effort to "expand curatorial expertise in a global context" and "suggest counter-geographies, alternative models of solidarity, and correspondence linking art practices in different parts of the world," according to the institution's website. This is inline with the geographical turn position adopted by large museums in the North as explored in part one of this thesis, in which museums adopt a position of "expansion" (i.e. starting from Eurocentric art history in the centre and expanding out into the periphery) rather than a more radical position of questioning the very idea of Europe as central to a global art history.

the same topic was held in one of the main hegemonic art institutions, the Museum of Modern Art in New York City).²⁹⁷

The authors' evidence of shared networking between artists in a time of perceived polarization during East and West provides a strong case for criticism of the Cold War periodization that is still in use, made by popular contemporary arts authors like Bishop and Sholette whose widely reviewed anthologies also address Latin American collective practices from the margins. Their first point in this citation is a description key to highlighting the way these artists defied their marginalized status within the art world – but from the very beginning of the quote it is based upon the idea that these artists necessarily operated from the position of the marginalized -- provincialism was something they had to escape. But marginalization is not a natural position inherent to any position, rather is it a position that always has to be adopted. But from the evidence laid out by the authors, we know that within their region, these artists were often in a privileged position, occupying a role in capital cities that were the centre of local history, economics and regional international politics. So while they were trying to 'escape the provincialism to which they had been consigned by history, geopolitics, and economics' they were also, in the same moment, occupying a central role in each of their own national or regional cities and art scenes.

²⁹⁷ As I have described in Chapter 1 (between Arab and Latin American artists), Kemp-Welch and Freire find a parallel in the enormous effort Latin American and Eastern European artists have had to make to counter their region's prescribed role within art history: "Latin American and Eastern European artists went to great lengths to escape the provincialism to which they had been consigned by history, geopolitics, and economics, by establishing contacts with like-minded artists at home and abroad. Networking trends to be classed as a strategy of subversion – a "tactic for thriving on adversity" – but we should be wary of constructing any artificially uniform, heroic narrative. One of the urgent tasks we face today, as delayed audience of these artistic initiatives, is the need to foster a sense of the subtle differences at play in a range of contexts in diverse political situations. The traffic between Latin American and Eastern European artists in the Cold War period reveals that the territory of artistic practice served as a site for the development of common languages that scramble "top-down" approaches to history characterized by the rhetoric of cultural polarization. (Kemp-Welch and Friere 2012, 4).

The second point brought up by the authors cautions against “constructing any artificially uniform, heroic narrative” about collective practices (like netowkring and artistic collectives) by assuming they can always be classified as strategies of subversion. It is from here that I will derive my first point of analysis in looking at collective production across four local scenes. Resistance and subversion of cultural stereotypes and tropes was present in every example of collective practice, but in no ways monolithic or consistently heroic. The following two sections discuss three main strategies for resistance that emerged from narratives and observations of artist groups between 2010 and 2014, strategies that are charted along a spectrum of subversion tactics which run counter to popular media representations and cultural tropes that circulate in the global art world, as discussed in Part 1 of this thesis.

Addressing Art Issues or Social Issues?

An engagement with art issues and social issues was found consistently in the practices of each group, across the ghost infrastructures of all four cities. Each artist group engaged in socially-engaged practices in which process was equally important as final product, and projects were informed by long-term relationships between the members of the group and various other communities of the city. Two general themes emerged in the way groups approached the intersection of art and social issues: practices that were primarily concerned with intervening in the larger social scene of the city through engaging non-artists, and practices that were primarily concerned with intervening in the art world (local and international) through addressing perceived inequalities.²⁹⁸ Perhaps these two themes represent inverse sides of the same coin – socially-engaged art, or artfully-engaged social activism.

²⁹⁸ When referring to “practices” I am describing artistic strategies which artists employed in their collective group units. In most cases, artist groups engaged in more than one kind of practice, as ways of achieving their overall motives and mission. The typeology of groups I present in this chapter were determined by the kinds of practices each group focused on, in addition to their mission and attitudes expressed in interviews and other interactions.

Regarding the first theme of artfully-engaged social practices, some groups sought to involve various audiences of non-artists in the process or experience of art: through museum style art workshops, through training participants to become citizen journalists, through transforming crumbling buildings in the old downtown into art centres or a pirated-goods street market into a public stage for art. One group produced a sticker campaign to intervene in the vocabulary of cultural stereotypes about Arab identity and terror in the news. Some of these approaches were more radical than others, with groups that infiltrated prisons to create performance art with the incarcerated, or brought the experience of violent border crossing to a theatre audience. Each of these practices focused on the transformative power of art used as a social tool; their primary audience were non-artist collaborators, with a secondary audience in the art world.

Regarding the second theme of artists who wanted to address perceived social inequalities in the arena of the art scene, for an art-world audience, this often happened through groups bringing art and art world audiences to unexpected places. For some this meant turning their city in a lab for research on local aesthetics and bringing in “experts” from other global cities to teach and learn in artist-created situations. For others, it meant having lively discussions to critique the treatment/receiving of local artists in an international scene, like, for example, the exoticisation of Arab artists by the North. Some addressed the lack of curatorial voices from their city through initiatives to develop Arab language art criticism in a scene dominated by English-language art writing. Other practices like these involved holding a biennial on a forgotten bordertown, cultivating art collectors who would buy small works about their city and its inhabitants directly from local artists, calling attention to local issues through addressing them in local and international art spaces (like class inequalities or the notion of a security crisis). Creating a huge visual archive of found photos and diverse cultural images outside stereotypical tropes, to be used as material for art exhibitions across the globe. The social issues these artist groups cared about enough to address embraced a range of topics from everyday

life, as well as perceived inequalities. For the most part, whether local or international, these practices strove to develop and strengthen a local voice in the art world.

The issue of using an art strategy to address social issues and inequalities in the art world also got caught up in nationalistic ideas about duty to one's country, an emotional sensibility amplified for many successful artists by international travel into the art world centres and the inevitable experience of representing one's country as a national representative in this sphere. Once back home, nostalgia often turned to a sense of patriotic duty to give back to the local scene as an act of patriotism, inspiring the well-known strategy of starting a free extra-curricular educational program for younger art peers, in order to act as a mentor and remedy a perceived lack of resources in the periphery. This was usually initiated by a master or mid level career artist who had travelled and exhibited in foreign lands, and decided to start a collective non-institutional education project upon their return to the homeland, with the desire to mentor and invest in the local talent of a younger generation of artists, hoping to inspire them with the new ideas and methods they had experienced abroad. In a sense this phenomenon can be read as a kind of performance, steeped in the notion of cultural capital but outside actual economic exchange, a scenario in which the master artist conceives of an initiative as a national duty that should be offered for free, outside the constraints of educational institutions, and with the goal of overcoming a perceived lack of education in order to raise the level of national art production and develop new practices and protagonists of the local art scene, with the hopes they would represent the nation on a global scene.²⁹⁹ It is a utopic project that lives inside the shell of institutionalized but under-resourced national structuralism; the goal was educational, but also national and collective, in that these kinds of projects sought to infuse a young art scene with new life (a frankensteinian lab of new talent and worldly experience with foreign technologies).

²⁹⁹ This story has repeated itself many times, in this thesis and in art history of the South in general. Chapter 1 contains many historical examples of artists who used the school-within-a-school model to bring about change in art practices and art ideologies, like Dr. Atl's early nationalist mural actions in the San Carlos Academy of Mexico City.

The method of a “school within a school” was common strategy used in realizing these projects: a workshop or classes taught to university students inside the university building but outside of the grading and formal studies program, and co-taught by successful local artists (some of whom also taught formally within the school). This model is based upon a kind of incubator methodology – the large formal institution acts as incubator for more experimental project, which can install itself within the institution and use it’s resources (buildings, teachers, students) while circumventing the barriers of a slow bureaucracy or nationally approved curriculum that was too slow or too unwilling to include new experimental art methodologies. In Cairo, for example, a master artist who had represented Egypt at the Venice Biennial recruited his former students, also successful contemporary artists, to help him hold a free, extracurricular summer school to teach new media to the students of the national university – sound art, video art, circuit bending – new media art that was not on the curriculum. In San Salvador, an older generation of artists organized a free seminar on contemporary art inside the local museum, offered to university art students and co-taught by guest artists from the region who had won local awards and had gallery/biennial representation abroad. In Mexico City, a group of students who took over a pirate radio station in another public university began to hold alternative conferences to discuss the intersection of theory, music, and the vernacular aesthetics of protest (zines, posters, blogs), in effect expanding the discussion of theory to non-formal spaces within the same university walls. The “school-within-a-school” incubator model also surfaced within other settings outside of schools in this sample of artist groups: there were groups who created an institution within an institution like one that fashioned itself after an art factory, comprised of members who worked in different arts institution and came together to share studio space and produce art together. Still others created an artist group within an art business as a creative not-for-sale outlet for its members. One group, for example, created a video art collective inside a music video production company, another created a group around a participatory art project inside a design firm. Both of these groups drew inspiration and techniques from their respective businesses, but chose to display their collective artistic work in separate contemporary arts spaces (museums, galleries, cultural spaces).

Under the general umbrella of the overlap between art and social spheres, the majority of groups expressed a strong interest in experimenting with the roles and positioning between art world and larger social world. In some cases, the merging of social issues and art issues, art audiences and non-art audiences got so bound up together that it became difficult to distinguish between these two worlds. But the main factor that separates the groups are the zones they choose to work in, and the methodologies they develop through which to carry out their mission-based work.

Overview of Types

I present three main types of groups on a spectrum of focus that ranges from social justice to the art world, each representing a different sphere of action (Chart 6a). On one extreme of groups favouring social issues over art issues are the Street Fighters, those who engaged in performative, interactive art actions with the primary goal of social justice (rather than of becoming artists). These groups could perhaps be labelled as activists, though in each group at least one or more of the main members did not consider themselves to be artists (rejecting the term as an identifier). Rather, they considered themselves activists who were using art methodologies to carry out missions driven by social justice or an inconformity with social norms. The Street fighters operated in a kind of combat zone from which they worked collectively and creatively to oppose social norms. City jails, university protests, anarchic punk music scenes, and post-war ruins became sites for collective actions of resistance. Often they worked anonymously, or semi-anonymously – signing their collective works with the title of their group. These groups chose to collaborate with working and under class populations and vernacular aesthetics, though for the most part, their members hailed from middle class, university-educated backgrounds.

On the other extreme of groups who favoured art issues over social activism, I have plotted a type I refer to as White-cubers. White-cubers are primarily concerned with becoming well-known in the local and international art scene though inserting themselves into the global aesthetic of modernism, a sphere represented by the ubiquitous white cube gallery. The white cube gallery, like its cousin, the global biennial, has sprung up all over the globe and is a visual shorthand for the church of modernism: the art hung upon its walls is sanctified as it enters the space of legitimization, taking its place under and around the trinity of contemporary art's curator, art star and white cube.

The White-cubers insert their own artwork into this aesthetic system by practicing the strategy of hanging their work in white cube gallery spaces of their own design and by displaying their work in white cube gallery spaces.³⁰⁰ They operate mostly in the international zone of the local art scene as exporters of local concepts, and exhibition-making was often the central reason for their existence. Gazing North to the art world centres, they brought locally-themed art objects and practices into the no-place zone of the white cube gallery, a passage which eventually enabled the works to be later sold in similar white galleries thousands of miles North in blue chip galleries like Charles Saatchi in London. Many, though not all White-cuber practices are characterized for their depoliticized aesthetic, and conceptual, minimalistic practice of extracting indexical objects from their contexts and placing them in sparse, white-walled contemporary art galleries. The White-cubers also had the most members who were either famous or achieved international fame during the lifespan of their artist group, as well as the most incidence of exhibiting abroad in big name biennials, galleries, and museums.

Somewhere in between Street Fighter and White-cubers ends of artistic practice, the Vernaculars inhabit a liminal zone of art-making and place-making defined by a combination of art and social issues. The visual and aesthetic languages they developed created a poetic inspired by the local urban vernacular found in their city's architecture,

³⁰⁰ This is not the only space the White-cubers chose as an exhibition space, though their portfolios show a preference for white cube spaces.

advertisements, newspapers, flea markets, to name a few sources. Their practices largely centre around bringing locally-inspired social issues into art practices aligned with but not limited to the contemporary art scene, and by bringing interactive art to new publics by finding (or building) audiences in unexpected places like black market stalls, facebook groups, newspaper readers, and city bus commuters. The artists who made up the groups that practiced this kind of art tended more often to be graduates of the city's public universities rather than private universities, a subtle class difference often accompanied by a consciousness about class and sometimes race, themes that appeared in their art more often than it did in the art of their peers in the two other groups. They also tended to reach out to other Souths or neighbouring countries within the same region to develop their art networks, to promote and build their portfolio of operations, artworks, and actions. Sometimes they also looked North for collaborators and funders, but embraced the art world's old centres in Europe and North America far less than their White-cuber counterparts. The exhibition spaces of Urban Vernaculars also tended to embrace more non-traditional spaces outside museum and gallery walls.

Each type embraces a different kind of art methodology: white cubers the aesthetic of the modernist institutional gallery; urban vernaculars the aesthetic languages of the city (advertising, architecture, vintage local text, political street signage, etc.); street fighters the performance of resistance to hegemonic social norms.

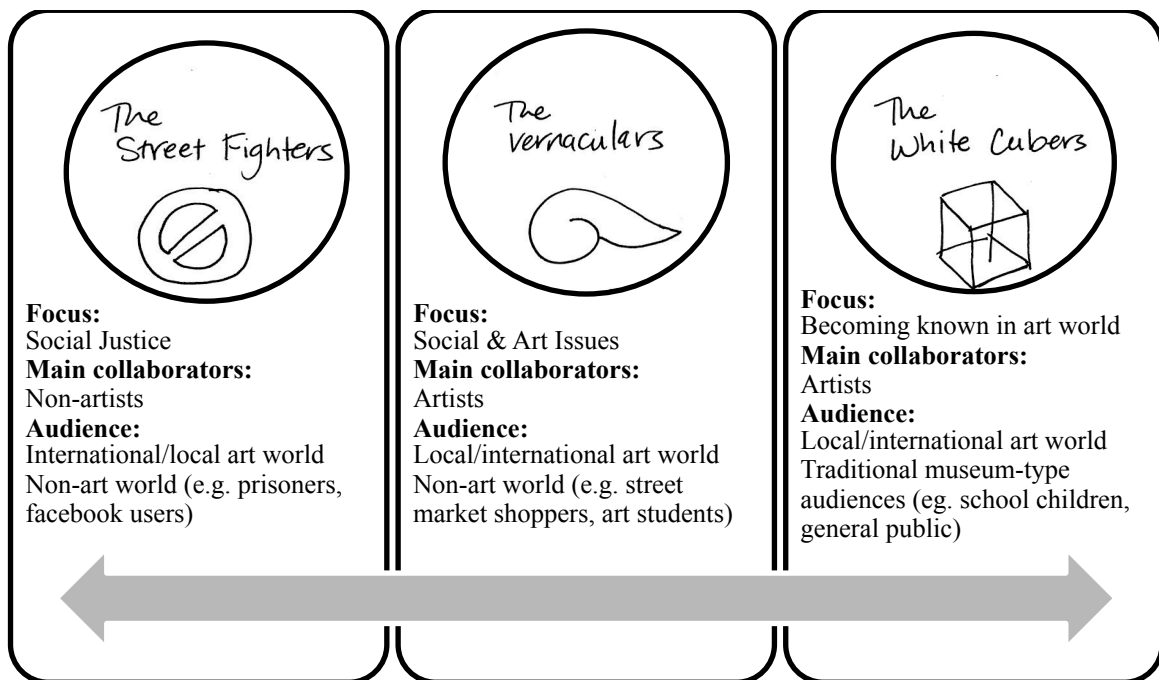


Image 6a. A typology of 21st century artist groups

Case Study 1: White-cubers in blank space

The methodology of embracing a contemporary art aesthetic emblazoned in the symbol of the white cube gallery is a common approach adopted by contemporary artists in the 21st century North. Whether individually or collectively, since at least the 1980s, artist groups, individual artists, galleries and museums have embraced the plain, white walls of the contemporary art gallery space. The term ‘white cube’ is described critically by Elena Filipovic as a fiction aimed at extracting the viewer from the world by placing them inside a white gallery, where the viewer is constructed as much as is the work of contemporary art, that has become “a universal signifier of modernity,” (Filipovic 2005, 1). The white cube is “a cypher for institutional officiousness” in which case the “fact that the artwork is bracketed off from the world also undermines the impression that it might be related to, or the same as, the stuff of everyday life.” (ibid) ³⁰¹

³⁰¹ Filipovic explains the key feature of the white cube is the way that, like hegemony, it is normalized to the point that it becomes invisible: “A bit like its cinematic black-box pendant, the museum’s galleries unequivocally aimed to extract the viewer from “the world.” For this and other reasons, the minimal frame of white was thought to be “neutral” and “pure,” an ideal support for the presentation of an art

While Filipovic provides a critical reading of the white cube and its meaning as a symbol of Western modernity and ideology (a mode of address that imagines a middle class white viewer of art who beholds an idol-like artwork in quasi-religious reverie), many artist groups around the globe embrace this aesthetic uncritically, recreating it in their own exhibition spaces and aiming to get their work into white cube space favored by the art world's blue chip galleries. In the South, though, the stakes are different as artists trespass into this Northern territory of the symbolic white cube. Adopting this aesthetic can mean translating ideas, contexts and theories from the South into the language of the white cube, the ultimate symbol of modernity in art.

And even though White Cubers chose this position of addressing an art issue over social issues, it did not mean these groups did not care about social issues – on the contrary, they often incorporated social issues into their exhibitions, but the white cube gallery was their preferred place of exhibition for their artwork and collective projects. Their artistic gaze was fixed North on the intended audience of the art world center. But this also did not mean their practices were uncritical of art and art systems of the European continent. Many used their ability to speak the language of the white cube to mobilize for greater visibility of their region in the exclusive sphere that had ignored or disregarded their legitimacy, to legitimize their artwork, and their position as outsiders in the art world. Many succeeded in gaining the attention of the art world centre's star curators, artists and institutions, which meant turning the North's gaze South and capturing its interest in a

unencumbered by architectural, decorative, or other distractions. The underlying fiction of this whitewashed space is not only that ideology is held at bay, but also that the autonomous works of art inside convey their meaning in uniquely aesthetic terms. The form for this fiction quickly became a standard, a universal signifier of modernity, and eventually was designated the "white cube." From the MoMA's whitewashing forward, the white cube became a cipher for institutional officiousness, fortifying the ultimate tautology: an artwork belongs there because it is there. (The fact that the artwork is bracketed off from the world also undermines the impression that it might be related to, or the same as, the stuff of everyday life). In that space of encounter, the ideal viewer (white, middle class) is also constructed – well behaved, solemn, disembodied, and able to focus on the singularity of the work of art with an uninterrupted gaze. Particular to the white cube is that it operates under the pretence that its seeming invisibility allows the artwork to speak best; it seems blank, innocent, unspecific, insignificant. Ultimately, what makes a white cube a white cube is that, in our experience of it, ideology and form meet, and all without our noticing it." (Filipovic 2005, 1).

previously ignored, marginalized region. This act in itself is now changing the system of the art world, as more and more institutions turn their gaze to the South. Once inside the white cube's space of legitimization, some groups elected strategies that harkened back to the Trojan Horse artworks of groups of the 1960s and 70s. One such group is 98weeks research project of Beirut, Lebanon.

In 2005 two cousins, Marwa and Mirene Arsanios, got the idea that would lead to 98weeks research project. It was a moment when both were studying in London, Marwa an artist who trained in graphic design and studied fine arts at Chelsea College of Art & Design, Mirene a writer who received an MA in art theory from Goldsmiths and later an MFA from Bard College. During graduate university in London, they often talked and exchanged ideas about their mutual affiliation for research-based art and the idea of art intervening in public space. While far from home, they dreamed of interacting with urban public space in their family's hometown of Beirut. They wanted to find a way to bring the famous artist Francis Alÿs to Beirut, to do projects in public space there using their shared curiosity of research-based arts thinking/making.

A hero of art school grads in London and across the globe, Alÿs's fame speaks to his relevancy to a generation of artists born in the 1980s, with a currency that translates across national boundaries with a playful charm that promises to achieve the impossible: his artworks moves mountains, crosses uncrossable borders, turns a fancy museum into a fox's playground. Alÿs's humoristic, sometimes political artwork revolves around his role as a Belgium migrant to Mexico who installed himself in the first generation of Mexican contemporary artists to become international art stars in the contemporary post-modern art world. He often works in Latin America and the Middle East, two Southern contexts of interest to Arsanios and Arsanios. They were especially interested in his methodology of walking as practice.

But to bring an artist of Alÿs's fame to your hometown and collaborate with him was no small feat; it was a daydream of many artists around the world. The cousins needed

international networks, they needed a presence and they needed a local infrastructure to support them. Both possessed fluency in the two most used languages of contemporary art: English, the language of the art world's centre (also a language often used for business in Beirut), and the visual language of contemporary art aesthetics (in which the white cube is arguably one of the most powerful discursive tools). Using these languages as cultural passports, the cousins set out to build a structure through which to launch into the international art network. With this structure and these skills, they found a solution for all three desires (urban public space, Beirut as stage, Alys as workshop collaborator). They created a structure that would act as a container for projects they wanted to do: an artist group called 98weeks research project would be this container.

In 2008 Alÿs and his collaborator, curator and art critic Cuauhtémoc Medina arrived in Beirut to do their first workshop ever in the city, led by the Arsanios cousins and the larger project they had built around the idea of using different approaches to examine local urban space, called *Beirut Every Other Day*. Over the course of six days, thirteen locally-based artist participants led Alÿs and Medina on a series of walks, each following a different path and narrative – daily travel routes through the city, gay cruising sites on the outskirts. Some of the artists led Alÿs by the hand as they walked Alÿs called his project Walk Me Tender, Beirut and 98weeks name the larger project As Long As I Am Walking.³⁰²

They crafted this “artist workshop” into a living organism quite different from the traditional artist workshop of museums and institutional spaces. As Long As I am Walking was a space for mutual critique, even of the two guest super stars, an

³⁰² They wrote of the experience: “Our guest super star artist became a site of projections, fascinations and conflict, through which, possibly and at best, participants could rework their relation to the city. Everything became very intense; decisions theorized, agendas and strategies were laid bare, territories contested, Alÿs’ professional cultural tourism suspicious and Cuauhtémoc’s overtly critical reading of everything, sometimes disturbing. However, in each route and through the encounter between Alÿs and the participants, something particular happened. This one to one encounter was almost sweet, up to the point that even the spreads covering tanks in the streets of Beirut looked like blankets (one of Alÿs’ comments). The encounter between Alÿs/participants/Beirut also created a dynamic based on individual experience and collective discussion” (98weeks 2008, 1)

intersection of practices from different disciplines, geographic locations and cultural backgrounds. During the time lapsed between Alÿs's first methodological steps on Lebanese soil and the Arsanios' initial idea in 2005, 98weeks was transformed from an idea to a the formal project in collaboration with a local network of artists and intellectuals. The local participants met for fifty-eight weeks before Alÿs and Medina's arrival, from October 31st of 2007 (the date marked the official founding of the 98weeks project) to December 11, 2008. In total, the time spent in preliminary dialogue with Alÿs and Medina, and all the way through the implementation of the walks and subsequent publication, totaled 98 weeks, or almost two years. After the project, Alÿs and Medina returned to Mexico but remained connected to Beirut – in 2012, Alÿs would participate in the Revolution vs. Revolution exhibition at the Beirut Art Center. 98weeks would go on to develop dozens of projects around urban space themes and international networks, inhabiting three different physical spaces.

In the early days, before the cousins rented a base of operations for 98weeks, they held workshops, reading groups, and events at Sanayeh House, a project by the Jadmur Collective, and at the American University of Beirut, a short walk from Sanayeh Gardens. Sanayeh House operated as a kind of incubator for many local and international collectives and local art scene initiatives, and especially for 98weeks as it's first informal home while it formalized into an organisation. When they got a space in 2009, a strip mall commercial space in the neighborhood Mar Mkal Nahr which they turned into a white cube gallery space, it became a platform space for artists in their network who proposed exhibitions to them.³⁰³

³⁰³ "You change your way of working when you have a physical location. People can identify you, people come to you more. They ask you if they can propose projects, you know, if they can do an exhibition, etc. So we're sort of um, let's say we're trying to organize the work in a way that on the one hand 98weeks becomes a public platform for people we collaborate with or who want to propose projects. And on the other hand we carry on with our own research as a collective 98weeks. And keeping that initial idea of investigating one theme over 98 weeks." (Mirene Arsanios in conversation with the author, December 2011)

Over the next seven years, they built a methodology out of their first project, adding two more ongoing projects to the ongoing intervention into local city space: Feminisms “a research project that looks at feminist discourses throughout history and their relation to critical discourses such as post-colonialism... [examining where it stands] in relation to broader social issues, particularly the Middle East” and On Publications “a series of events exploring printed matter, language and text... re-reading historical arts and culture publication produced and distributed in the Arab world since the 1930s” The latter included an independent book fair and online radio programming “on the poetics and politics of language.” Every project was approached with the same methodology of art research as a collaborative effort, with a regular group of participants and collaborators meeting once a week over periods close to 98 weeks to discuss and develop projects around a particular research theme. During this time, 98weeks also added a board of members from different academic and artistic disciplines, and welcomed international curators who worked with them, as well as interns from abroad and neighborhood areas in the city. Their tenure has been defined by a common denominator: successful insertion into international and regional art circuits, building a place for themselves in the local scene and international art world. They maintained links to other groups in the Arab region; in 2010 they were interviewed by Allam for MedrarTV.

Neither cousin (nor the collective voice of 98weeks) explicitly claims an allegiance to the aesthetics of the white cube gallery, but nonetheless it is a common thread in the visuals of their projects (see Beirut Appendix in this thesis for more evidence) and, like other White Cubers (such as CIC in Cairo or Adobe in San Salvador), their success in garnering international attention is on par with their ability to translate their ideas into the international language of aesthetics so popular in the exhibition and biennial circuit. In the summer of 2014, eight years after 98weeks was founded, Marwa Arsanios’s art was featured in the New Museum’s Here and Elsewhere, “a major exhibition of art from and about the Arab world” (The New Museum 2015). The show was criticized as predictable and depoliticized contemporary art that looked like it could come from any place in the world, with art from the so-called Arab world that was, like contemporary art from

almost anywhere in the world “Starbucks-predictable, with nearly the same ingredients to be found at any location worldwide, reaping returns with the same formula.” (Kirsch 2014). Corinna Kirsch, of the online magazine, Art F City, wrote a critique of the uniformity of aesthetic she found in the exhibition that also included the work of CIC founding artists, Maha Maamoun. Here, the excerpts echo tropes critiques of Southern artists explored in Chapter 1, sounding also like the white cube phenomenon:

[In] *Here and Elsewhere*, the New Museum’s current exhibition of art from the Arab World... We’re told contemporary art should look like other contemporary art and exhibitions, and that if that art is political, it should reference past events. [The exhibition] leads with the concept of “globalism.”... Though you might not recognize the names of the approximately 45 artists in this exhibition... the work will seem familiar to anyone who ever heads out to art fairs, biennials, and blue-chip galleries. Most of it looks like it’s for sale. That generalized “new art” gloss includes everyday objects reconstructed into strange sculptures (Rheims Alkadhi’s crumpled rubber tube, or Hassan Sharif’s plastic sandal piles), colorful, textured abstract paintings (Etel Adnan’s AbEx monochromes also featured in the 2014 Whitney Biennial), re-stagings of historical events (Marwa Arsanios’s “Have You Ever Killed a Bear?”), or invisible histories. (Kirsch 2015).³⁰⁴

Kirsch’s critique summarizes the essence of the aesthetic that defines the White Cubers – indexical objects extracted from local contexts and inserted into the sacred space of the church of modernity’s white cube, where it is validated and a price tag is added. Her critique is also rife with stereotypes about artists from the South, assuming the position that art from the Arab world should necessarily teach viewers in the North about its region (or be read as a national representation) or underscoring the idea that art from the South imitates art theory and practices from the North. A review by Holland Cotter in the New York Times asked if it was even possible to avoid stereotypes with an identity exhibition produced in 2014, after much post-colonial criticism of this form, but concluded that it might still be a necessary way for Americans to learn about art from this region (Cotter 2014, C9).

³⁰⁴ Kirsch continues, “These methods are common in contemporary art can usually be traced to an established market... engaging with by-now familiar art theory on indexicality and trace. That recognizable brand of global contemporary art shouldn’t be a shock in an exhibition of artists who no longer live in their home countries. A handful have been schooled in Europe or abroad (or currently live in places like Berlin and Amsterdam); they have the luxury to relocate, and be an artist. *Here and Elsewhere* shows what we already know to be true about the art world; no matter where you’re from, you’re allowed entrance to the art world if you have access to the right networks. It makes sense, then, that *Here and Elsewhere* would not try to show all types of contemporary art being produced in the Middle East—that would be an impossible task, especially given the current state of unrest in many Arab World countries.” (Kirsch 2015)

In the same year of the Here and Elsewhere exhibition, the cousins closed their headquarters in the Mar Mkhayel gallery, explaining on their blog: “due to gentrification the Project Space was unexpectedly lost”. They re-opened with another white cube gallery space, six months later in April of 2015 at a new venue in the same neighborhood of Mar Mkhayel. Replicating their first gallery space almost exactly, the question arises - why did they choose another white cube gallery space – was it really about marketing themselves to an international, market-driven art world, as critics like Kirsh have implied about groups and artists that adopt this look? Looking at the 98weeks model from a historical perspective, it might appear at first glance to fit the classic model of artist groups from the South discussed in Chapter 1, like Art et Liberté.

The choosing of the name, 98weeks, also mirrored the concept of the white cube gallery as a blank slate ready to be filled with any content. Explaining their choice in name, Mirene Arsanios described it as something that “sounded cooler, less charged... it doesn’t connote something; you don’t easily assign a meaning to. It can stay open – it’s meant to indicate a structure rather than context.” (Conversation with Author 2010).

But, like the Georges Henein and the other Egyptian surrealists who brought international and national attention to diverse social issues in Cairo, the Arsanios cousins widened the discussion of by steadfastly carving out a space for their discourses and creative desires (in effect, building narratives that went against the logic of international media and even institutional art collections, which mostly ignore issues like feminism and or poetic political publications in the Middle East and Arab world). Mirene described the project as an organization without a specific agenda (beyond place-making, or having a presence). But even without an agenda, they consistently carved out a place for collective arts research methodologies,³⁰⁵ while strengthening their individual practices, as well as the

³⁰⁵ Marwa describes her individual artistic practice as “very researched-led.” “I have different artworks coming out at different stages of the research.” This practice was made uniquely explicit in the collective methodology of 98weeks.

individual practices of other 98weeks participants, which continued to grow during the course of their collective projects. As an artist group, they helped contribute to the local arts infrastructure as incubators for local practices and as a platform.³⁰⁶ They also inserted their presence into international networks, consistently building in new approaches. In conclusion to this section, I close with a quote from Marwa Arsanios' 2015 essay that builds on South-South connections between Lebanon and Mexico, written as part of an Arab Image Foundation residency for Sur Journal, a poetic, political text mediating on a historical link between Mexico and Lebanon:

"The grand exotic night/une grande nuit exotique" that announces itself in the first advertisement is one from a series of thematic nights that used to take place in "Acapulco" between 1956 and 1975: African night, Mexican night, Hawaiian night, Caribbean night . . . The "exotic" place points at a faraway geography. These images, initially produced for tourists from the rich global north, were widely distributed across the globe. Racial, class, and gender tensions were erased in these images. (Arsanios 2015, 3)³⁰⁷

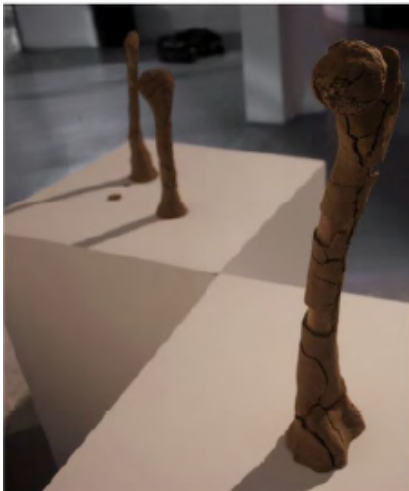
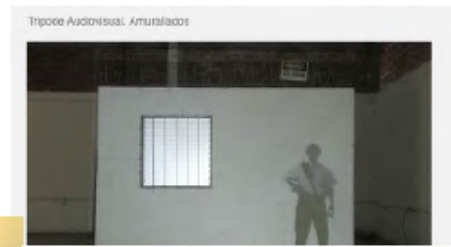
If 98weeks entered the sphere of the global contemporary by means of a white cube aesthetic but rendered new methodologies and themes visible in the public imaginary, perhaps their work can be understood as using a Trojan horse kind of strategy to subvert

³⁰⁶ Since its founding, 98weeks maintained collaborations with other artist groups, organizations and spaces in Beirut. In addition to ongoing networking with Sanayeh House and the founders of the Jadmur Collective, 98 weeks also held events in the performance space and activist pub Zico House. Founding members of Zico house and the design/illustration group Samandal (which produces graphic novels) often participated in the two year-long discussions around each research topic. They have also collaborated on projects with Medrar in Cairo, and were interviewed by Mohamed Allam for Medrar TV.

³⁰⁷ Arsanios' text lyrically explores the relationship between migration, class, N/S, gender and images of the exotic created through advertising: "If being modern in Lebanon was about showing the legs of a woman and her back to the sea, then the "Acapulco Beach Resort" would be the incarnation of the modern. In films such as Nadia el jundi, this landscape is used like a wallpaper background... The image becomes an aestheticization of the faraway... Entertainment for the middle class is produced. The image will become the place and the place will look like the image of Acapulco that Pepe—owner of the "Acapulco Beach Resort"—brought with him when he decided to move back to Lebanon from Mexico in the 1950s to work in the leisure industry. Pepe was born in Mexico. Like many of his generation, he was the son of immigrants who took a boat and sailed to Mexico at the beginning of the twentieth century, hunger and poverty in that part of the world driving a lot of people to move away. An image of the "Acapulco Beach Resort" was taken by Doxiadis, a Greek architect, in 1956 when he was invited by the Lebanese government to propose a social housing project plan that would rehabilitate people living in the slums behind it and give them housing units in the future Mkallès project. Doxiadis took this photo while on a research trip to Beirut, and it shows an empty beach resort during the winter, very unlike all the circulated images we have of it from newspapers, personal archives, or films. What was lying outside the frame of the image of people dancing in "Acapulco Beach Resort" soon reached it. Boom boom tak tak boom boom tak boom boom tak tak boom boom tak... And the music goes on." (Arsanios , 2015, 3)

the commonly held beliefs about Arab art and broaden the dialogue by bringing new voices and Beirut-based themes directly to the international sphere of contemporary art. Certainly, other groups used this strategy to enter the international art scene after their region had been largely ignored by the art world establishment's Northern centre for decades. Colectivo Artificio formed for just one year, bringing a kind of White cube school to San Salvador's national art museum, in which university art students learned to shift their craft-based practices to a conceptual, minimalist contemporary art aesthetic (inserting their work into the white cubes of a local private galleries and competitions held by Spanish and French cultural centres) through an extra-curricular year-long workshop, Mauricio Kabistan, one of the participants, explained how his work underwent a dramatic transformation in this process, from ceramic terra cotta sculpture to a teacup lined in mud and a book made of bound copies of the local newspaper art and culture magazine. With these new works, Kabistan won a competition from the Spanish Cultural Centre, and went on to found a collective of his own. In 2015 he represented El Salvador at the Venice Biennial.

Because this kind of group was formed in response to an art need the goal is to become a presence in the international scene of contemporary art; this was mostly achieved through exhibition-centred collectivism that was collaborative in nature – artists working together as units in a larger structure like an exhibition or the art center of CIC. Groups that adopted this position include: 1) Cairo: CIC and Rooftop Studio 2) in Beirut: 98weeks Research Project and the Jadmur Collective 3) in Mexico City: Laboratorio Curatorial 060 and Rotatorio 4) San Salvador: Colectivo Artificio, Adobe, La Fabri-K, and Tripode Audiovisual. These groups also tended to have the most ties to Europe and the US, in terms of funding and educational formation (graduate school).



Images 6b-6f. White-cubers. Clockwise from top left: Adobe (Ciudad Encajada, Simon Vega, 2001). Tripode Audiovisual (Amurrallados, video installation at La Fabri-K, 2009. Laboratorio Curatorial 060 (Se Busca Venus). Rooftop Studios gallery and living space in Saida Zeynab neighbourhood. Colectivo Artificio (Image from exhibition Tregua para el Aburrimiento, art by Melissa Guevara, 2009. The gallery space of 98 Weeks Research Project in the Mar Mkhel neighbourhood of Beirut.

Case Study 2: Urban-vernaculars and the aesthetics of difference

Vernaculars are artist groups formed out of a perceived duality in the desire to meet an artistic and social need. They often worked in traditional white wall gallery exhibition spaces as much as they did in extra-exhibitionary spaces – outside, in bars, clubs, in the street, in the countryside and other non-gallery spaces. They also often brought vernacular aesthetics into the white cube institutions with which they collaborated. Many also adopted South-South theories of alliances, art exchanges, and politicized consciousness. These groups include: 1) in Cairo: Medrar and Studio Emad Eddin, 2) in Beirut: Stereotipo and the Arab Image Foundation, 3) in Mexico City: Teatro Ojo and Satanismo Critico, 4) in San Salvador: Colectivo Urbano. While these groups were concerned with becoming known on an international level, they were just as concerned with becoming a presence in the local and regional scene (sometimes even more so in the latter). Medrar, for example, focused on Arabic language programming (workshops, art criticism, curating) because they perceived a lack of this at CIC, where programming was first produced in English or bilingually. In terms of socio-economic class, the members of groups in this zone tended to be from lower middle class background or the working class – most studying art at the local public university rather than the private universities where their peers in the other two zones studied (The White Cubers and Street Fighters tended to have studied in more elite institutions, and had more educational experiences abroad). The vernaculars found creative strategies to bring the local vernacular into dialogue with the (Euro-centric) aesthetics of contemporary art, occupying a dual gaze that focused on the local scene and the art scenes of neighbouring countries. Most were also cooperative in nature – producing cooperative projects together, each contributing their own style to aesthetic works like a group zine, pirate radio station, street market stalls, or a collections of found images. Much of their artwork and projects can be described as interventionist in the way they intervene in the social imaginary of the city.

Urban Vernacular artist groups use the aesthetics of everyday city life in their artwork. Like the canvas strategy of graffiti, any surface and any place in the city can become a

canvas, a backdrop, a scene for the art of the Urban Vernaculars. Sometimes their art is participatory, sometimes it even takes place inside, but more often than not, it brings the outside aesthetics of the city (visuals, sounds, histories) into the inside world of contemporary art. Their work tended to function at this crossroads, bringing together the visual and sonic worlds of contemporary art and its white cube scenery, into contact with the outside aesthetics of the city. This was invariably always a culture clash, of high and low brow, street and elite images, performances, soundscapes and narratives. Instead of the kind of participatory that getting non-artists involved in the experience of art making, the Urban Vernaculars favoured a kind of participatory exposure – bring art to new and diverse audiences by taking it out of traditional venues, and out of the frame of commonly used devices or tropes in contemporary art. By bringing art to unexpected places – street markets, shanty-towns, the ruins of abandoned buildings, early morning bus rides to work, the Urban Vernaculars engaged new audiences by taking art out of the sanctity of the white cube.

By some readings, Urban Vernaculars fit the aesthetic so attractive to Biennials and Institutions that sometimes seek to incorporate them into their system of market value: they are outsiders, living and working amongst the precarious urban ruins and making artwork that reflects what the art-institution has marketed as “ghetto-chic”. But rather than creating artwork that fits this flimsy two-dimensional stereotype, the Urban Vernaculars find value in the intersection of worlds divided by class in their city, bringing to light the paradoxes and inner-workings of a diverse strata of organization in urban space.

Colectivo Urbano of San Salvador was one such group, an anomaly in the local art scene because they were outsiders in terms of class (they were often criticized for their taste in artwork and mission) and institutional affiliation and validation (they had none), yet everyone in the scene knew their name and had seen their artwork. In the Fall of 2009 my friend Alejandra and I lived with Urbano in their studio, and later re-interviewed them in

the Spring of 2012, hanging out with the crew over a period of several months.³⁰⁸

The transient architecture of informal black markets selling pirated goods has taken over downtown San Salvador, both a daily shopping spot for the working class and a symbol of divided territory marked by class lines and gang affiliations. The members of the Urbano collective take on the role of the street pirate, creating and marking their territory by installing dangerous and haphazard street market stands, where they produce and give away souvenirs commemorating street culture (prints, bookmarks, condoms, and poems). Based upon the aesthetics of informal vendors,” elaborates one of the founding members, Renacho Melgar, “we created a stand. A street market stand, with the intention of thinking about how someone comes to take over a space. We did this exercise in four different spaces. Each stand corresponded geographically to a physical place. One we did in true Mexican style, with all the merchandise on the floor. Another was very San Salvador, where we created an almost dangerous space for people to walk by, as it was falling over into the street.”

They mark their space as artists who move comfortably between the outside working class world of the street and the cloistered upper-middle class world of galleries.³⁰⁹ Their

³⁰⁸ From my field notes of November 26, 2009: “Yesterday we moved into an empty store room in the back of Barbu’s. Three metal gates barricade the entrance – so when a gunman arrives the people on the top have a little more time to run. After hours, the place is guarded by two night watchmen and we have the company of an Argentinian surfer who’s crashing in the room next to ours, a room filled with paint supplies and canvases. It’s the studio space of Colectivo Urbano where we’ll crash for the week. Los Urbano, or the Urbans as they sometimes called, is made up of a ragtag group of art school drop outs, who banded together in 2009 after quitting the art department at the local public university out of protest over differences of opinion they had with professors who told them they didn’t have talent and weren’t artists. Renacho Melgar and Jorge Merino were among the main founders and leaders of the group. They welcomed new members, recruiting public university students like Evan (Evangelina) Flores and Lourdes Calero, or ex-gang members like Elmer Flores. They invited foreign emerging artists to join and local teaching artists like Sara Boulougne and poets like Oscar López, Rhency Giovanni, and even Miguel Servillón, a middle-aged lawyer experimenting with photographic sculptures.”

A friend of the collective, Manuel Gallardo, shows up to install his photo show next to Evan’s (often two members claim a space together). Manuel’s great grandfather founded the nearby historic town of Santa Tecla, where he works as a muralist assistant. Renacho introduces us, but Manuel interrupts him, Yo se quienes son – ¡las mexicanas! I heard all about your project. Soon after the place fills with a crowd of young Salvadoran professionals, preppies, tourists and American exchange students. As other artists & collectives show up and Renacho introduces us to everyone who arrives as “the Mexican girls I was telling you about – the ones with the project on collectives.”

practice is based upon negotiating a space between these two worlds,³¹⁰ a phenomenon akin to what Gustavo Buntinx calls, “politically positioning a prospective community to be culturally brought out of the transformative friction between the educated petty bourgeoisie and the emergent popular experience.”²

Street vending is a major theme that has inspired their collective artistic study of a phenomenon that dominates the downtown area. There the streets are shrouded in plastic stalls selling all kinds of cheap merchandise, mainly Chinese imports and pirated goods. The semi-permanent street markets attest to the ingenuity of the jobless, but are also a symbol of lawlessness, and fear for local residents, many of whom have been sequestered

³⁰⁹ Urbano has crafted a strategy to profit from mediating between San Salvadoran social classes and their differing interests (from 2011 field notes): “In their make-shift studio spaces, where Renacho held court as the lead artist and procurer of sponsorships and commissions from wealthy patrons there was always a host of friends, there was a steady flow of coffee, canvases, groups members and visitors passing through (mostly artists and hippies from throughout Latin America). They work steadfastly on one goal: creating as many exhibitions as possible, anywhere and everywhere. In the first year alone, they surpassed their goal of creating an exhibition every month, producing 15 fifteen exhibitions in unlikely places like the feared black market streets of downtown, trannie bars, city parks that were territory of sex workers, abandoned houses in the country-side. They displayed their work on walls, buildings, public sculptures, ice cream street vender carts, shoe shine boxes, as well as in places where students often showed work, like the national theatre in the old downtown. Merino, “el cibernetico” produced all of the flyers everything in minute detail. Their themes reflect popular aesthetics of working class experiences and the social architecture of the city: clowns who beg for money in the streets, the crowded routes to work on city buses that are reformed school buses, drugstore makeup, etc. The street vendor, the street worker, the security guard and the black markets of their city – where they dressed as pirates among pirated goods -- merchandise sold on street markets and in city corners are part of the poetics of artistic discourses which overlap with social experience.”

³¹⁰ From my field notes, an example of how Urbano works the market and cultures of two worlds: “Elmer is taking down his exhibition of solo works in one of the rooms, of large prints made completely with recycled objects, depicting urban poverty with a flair for the carnivalesque: a clown sniffing glue, a paper boat lost in the aguas negras streams of the gutter. He hasn’t sold even one in the weeks it’s been up, but the point he says is just to introduce a theme to the chosen audience for this location (upper middle class Salvadorans). Evan is putting her show up at the same time, and the contrast is strikingly non-political, with oil paintings of stained glass-looking dancing people and happy dogs. She sells one of the happy dog pieces later that night within an hour of opening the show, for \$300 to two dog owners who like the colours and plan to hang her painting in the living room of their house. Here are two themes I see strongly coming through in the collective’s work: 1) narrative, playful depictions of urban poverty and its strategies (scavenging, pirating, street vending, sex work in public spaces) and 2) decorative paintings and prints, often cartoon-like or like a greeting card, a kind of art geared at a local middle class who does not have much knowledge of contemporary art, many first time buyers. The first branch of work is not as marketable, yet at the heart of the group’s social practice (street performances, workshops, public works). Only the more well-known members of the group have been successful in selling these pieces to hotels, galleries and collectors, especially those whose collections document local, urban Salvadoran history. The second branch is highly marketable, and many of the members support themselves by selling this art, to the disdain and criticism of other artists and local institutions.” (See Appendix 1 for full fieldnotes).

and robbed amidst the never-ending curtains of DVDs, baby clothes and plastic sandals. In their *Pirate Series* (2009) they created alter-ego characters of archetypal pirates who fight invisible opponents and find a safe harbour among downtown street vendors. In *Territorios en Tránsito* (2009) they installed their own haphazard street market stands in San Salvador's parks and public markets, where they produce and give away souvenirs commemorating street culture (prints, bookmarks, condoms, and poems).

Drawing upon their familiarity with working class culture, they mark their space as artists, moving comfortably between the outside working class world of the street and the cloistered upper-middle class world of galleries. Their practice is based upon negotiating a space between these two worlds, a phenomenon which brings to mind what Gustavo Buntinx calls, "politically positioning a prospective community to be culturally brought out of the transformative friction between the educated petty bourgeoisie and the emergent popular experience." (Buntinx 2006, 215). As Renacho Melgar describes in his explanation of their street market interventions, the group was very conscious about different kinds of publics who had different class experiences.³¹¹

In the work of Colectivo Urbano, the street stall and its product, the inexpensive pirated merchandise, become the medium for artistic creation. But instead of merely documenting or condemning the phenomenon, as media reports often do, the two objects become the basis for artistic exploration. Creating a world where fictional characters narrate the real and imaginary uses of such objects, they propose questions around the

³¹¹ From a 2011 interview: "Renacho Melgar: Based upon the aesthetics of informal vendors, we created street market stand[s] with the intention of thinking about how someone comes to take over a space. Each stand corresponded geographically to a physical place. One we did in true Mexican style, with all the merchandise on the floor. Another was very Salvadoran, where we created an almost dangerous space for people to walk by, as it was falling over into the street. [For a collective exhibition of contemporary art in downtown parks] Our group chose the area of the park where the sex workers are. It was our plan to intervene in that space and see what happens. We start making bookmarks with phrases written on them, phrases that the public uses to mark territory, or public space. The words of that particular space were those of the sex workers - basic phrases, like "Come over here, baby." A lot of people really believed we were normal street vendors. Even so... we want the idea to go a little further, so that people get it, the concept. But we think that this kind of idea will only work with people that are accustomed to buying things in the street... the idea of going to the street and taking something away with you."

simultaneous signification of danger, entrepreneurship, survival, social class divisions and the transnational exchange of cheap merchandise. Astrid Bahamond, the local art historian and cultural worker, described their aesthetic and working class roots that shaped their experience:

The Urbans... what they're doing is playing... they're playing! They all create work on the same themes- IT's urban, urban, urban. And these guys are poor- if they are attending the National University it's because the National University is almost free. They don't have any other way of accessing the arts -- so they look for grants and other things, subsidies from NGOs to do projects in the street. And they're very young. But all that aside, you gotta give them their place [in our history], right? (Interview with author, 2010).

Colectivo Urbano ended with an unexpected event. Over the six years of lifespan, Renacho and Jorge fell out with some members, made up with others. They each fell in love and married their true loves, Gaby and Melissa. Other members welcomed babies, some of the students graduated and others never went back to school. Most importantly for the dynamics of group, the individual artworks of several members began to be included in important local collections, at boutique hotels and in the homes of local doctors and lawyers. A gallery that catered to a tourist market in Suchitoto, a colonial resort town near San Salvador, began to represent them regularly. Renacho and Jorge, two of the most prolific artists of the group, were especially favored among gallerists and collectors. With his motto, "Any wall is a good place to hang my art on,"³¹² Melgar had put his art into circulation around the city on hundreds of walls in the old historic centre: fixed walls on vernacular monuments like doors, mango stands, cemetery crosses and the rhinoceros on the corner of 3.^a calle poniente y 1.^a avenida norte, ephemeral walls of local bars, galleries and cultural centres, and moving walls of shoe shine boxes and minuta vendors who sold ice cream for 15 cents from a cart painted in Melgar's signature tropical cubism style. Through the years of the collective, his practice grew and spread, making its own visual maps through the working class streets of the San Salvador, a place where middle class Salvadorans feared to tread including some who worked and showed

³¹² Facebook post, Dec. 12, 2011.

at CCESV.³¹³ And though he had circled the gated walls of the CCESV gallery many times (walls guarded by men with machine guns), Melgar was never able to penetrate it, not even to trespass with his art. And finally in 2014, the groups' position as outsiders took a total 360 turn when Renacho was invited to exhibit "Ambulante" the documentation of his wall interventions around the city at *La Casa Tomada*, the holy grail of local contemporary art exhibition spaces, located in the Centro Cultural de España, a place that had once hated his practice and criticized his prolific ambitious desire to exhibit anywhere and everywhere, and had even said what he made was not contemporary art. All of this changed the moment he was invited to cross over the forbidden lines meant to keep out anything not to the taste of the dominant filter represented by the curators and institution of the Spanish Cultural Centre. There, he took his place on the white cube gallery walls with artists from his same generation (two from other groups in this study), artists he had classified as 'fresa' from middle class neighborhoods with private university educations, in a collective exhibition based upon the concept of artists from the same age or generation (titled *¿Esto no es una de-generación?*).³¹⁴ At that moment, Melgar turned from outsider to insider in the local contemporary scene, bypassing the filter that had once excluded him entering into the most sacred of spaces, where all of the internationally known Salvadoran contemporary artists had exhibited work or won prizes (for many, a first showing at CCESV meant international fame in the North would soon be forecasted in their future). And soon after, the merry band of Urbano parted ways, laying to rest the exhibition collectivism they had carried as a banner for six years.³¹⁵

³¹³ After several years of these creative interventions into the cityscape with the help of his collective members, Melgar's art was featured in the daily local newspaper, *La Prensa Grafica*, with the headline: *Carretones de minutas, cajas de lustrabotas, puertas, champas y hasta cruces en cementerios. Renacho Melgar ha intervenido diferentes lugares de El Salvador. Pero detrás de cada color hay una anécdota y una transformación.* <http://www.laprensagrafica.com/2013/10/13/magia-en-el-color#sthash.r2Y6yzPz.dpuf>

³¹⁴ Is this not a de-generation? (author's translation).

³¹⁵ Perhaps this entrance was a desired outcome from the beginning of Melgar's planning of the group—even though a self-proclaimed outsider, the group was always in orbit of other art spaces and collective organizations as I observed in 2011 and 2012 field notes: (from 2011) "It's seven o'clock on a Friday and people are starting to congregate at Barbú. Upon entering each visitor must announce themselves at the locked gate before being admitted by armed guards and passing through the long stairway leading up to a wide space on the second floor. A rum drink at Barbu costs \$4, almost as much as a week's minimum wage in El Salvador. Just down the street, a few blocks away along the four lane highway that divides the pink



Images 6g-6m. Urban Vernaculars. Clockwise from top left. Teatro Ojo (Atlas para Electores, 2012). Arab Image Foundation (Hashem El Madani Map). Medrar (Installation in gallery/workshop space, 2011). Buscaniguastudio (Graffiti mural using Banksy style and indigenous Mayan color palette). Studio Emad Eddin (Dance workshop as part of Downtown Cairo Arts Festival, or D-Caf). Colectivo Urbano (Pirate Series, 2010). Jadmure Collective (Sanayeh House).

zone, is the European Cultural Centre, a place where none of the artists in Urbano have ever exhibited. It's one of the premier centres that supports and builds the careers of local contemporary art talent, though Urbano has never won any of the centre's contests, and never participated in any of their workshops. The members of the group might be friends with some of the collectives and individual artists who show work at the centre, but they are definitely positioned as outsiders."

Case Study 3: Dance of the Street-fighters



Images 6n-6p. Street-fighters. From top to bottom. StereoTypo (Online tool to create your own social commentary about stereotypes of Arabs in the news). 6n: La Lleca (photo documenting performative action in Mexico City prison, photo courtesy of La Lleca archive). 6o. 666ismo Critico (Poster using interventions on vernacular found art from street markets, relating to the closing of the protest pirate radio station central to the practice of artist group 666ismo Critico).

The third and most radical group I describe as the Street fighters. Members of these groups considered themselves activists first and foremost, or denied the term all together. They used art and arts methodologies as their main strategy to fight for social change, and their primary audience was not in the gallery but on the street. In my ethnographic study, I only came across two of these groups: La Lleca in Mexico City and Stereotipo in Beirut. Satanismo Critico shared some characteristics with this group as well. Yet outside

this study, several well-known collective artist projects also fit this description: Tania Bruguera's Immigrant Movement International project (IMI) that founds community centres as sites of radical education, or Heartland of Beirut, an anonymous collective that addressed social issues through street interventions in the neighborhoods of their city. These groups can also be called interventionist – using art methodologies to intervene in the social structure of the non-art world. This formation of artist group also showed the strongest affiliation to the collective form – in which members signed/authored art works as one unit. Another thing these groups had in common is a shared socio-economic background as part of the middle and upper middle classes; many formed their ideas about art and social issues while studying or living abroad. By and far, this group embraced social practices as the heart and soul of their mission, often through radical education. Bojana Piskur, a Slovenian curator who started a project called Radical Education, offers some thoughts on the ethos of this kind of collectivity:

Radical education does not refer to a discipline or a body of knowledge, as Henry Giroux put it, but it suggests a particular kind of practice and a particular posture aimed at questioning received institutions of institutionalized learning and received assumptions regarding knowledge production, exchange and distribution. (Piskur 2011).³¹⁶

Piskur's description of radical education as an artistic medium is precisely where these groups are working from. Instead of focusing on the tried and true ways of conceptualizing art – through its production, exchange and distribution – these groups consider the mode of address as radical education rather than solely as art. Because they formed in response to a social need, their main goal is not to change the art world, but to

³¹⁶ Piskur continues, "I have been following the discussions about "relational practices" that you mention as well as Rancière's writings on politicized art whom Bishop takes as one of the reference points in her argument. Relational practices for me are not just practices which include certain more or less successful collaborations but are beforehand also autonomous and concrete works of art. There is where the paradox occurs; how can these works be evaluated on the basis of good or bad collaboration if the critical apparatus is usually not even a part of their process making? The only ones who are "ethically" in a position to evaluate these works as such would be the very participants involved in the processes. An example comes from the study of systems – art system being one of them – where changes only appear when the members of a particular system have experiences outside the network of conversation, which is everything that cannot be explained from the inner logic of the system itself. Which leads precisely to the production of knowledge beyond what is presently known. This was a departure point for the Radical Education project." (ibid)

to offer a solution to a social need through art, becoming an artist in process. This strategy of intervening in social non-art world takes the art world as a secondary audience. After addressing the primary artist and producing the work of art in that discursive setting, these collectives present documentation of this process in galleries (some white cube, others extra-exhibitionary spaces) for a removed audience that pertains to the art world. La Lleca, for example, has garnered an international presence, as well as grants from contemporary art foundations, through presentation of their performances with prisoners in their city's jails. Piskur describes this methodology of radical education as a system-changing endeavor, a phenomenon which is most evident and extreme in the practices of the Street fighters, but also found in the other two zones of collectivism from the South.

Some authorities on socially engaged, or participatory art might classify the Street Fighter style of activism as the main purveyors of participatory art (Claire Bishop, for example, examines Bruguera's IMI as a prime example of the kind of art practice she identifies as participatory). But participatory practices can be found embedded in the actions and artworks of all three types. The white cubers tended to engage more in participatory practice for art's sake – *Looking for Venus* or *Tráfico* by Laboratorio 060 are examples. They engage non-artist audiences in the process of live art but not for the sake of any more noble cause than for the sake of sharing the experience of art. The street fighters, on the contrary, tended to engage audiences in art making as a tool for social change, while the vernaculars used alternative formats like zines, playlists, and radio shows with non-artists, in an effort to bring public awareness to social issues as well as alternative aesthetics. Sometimes, groups within the same scene would criticize the formats or participatory methods of other groups. Two members of 666 described to me a moment in which they felt at odds with a member of Rotatorio, in terms of aesthetic and participatory choices. Both groups engage in participatory practices with non-artist audiences, but at an encounter of artist groups organized by curator/arts worker Sofia Olascoaga when she was a student at Mexico City's La Esmeralda, a member of Rotatorio picked up one of 666's publications and said, "Nosotros no hacemos zines, lo

que nosotros hacemos es otra cosa...” drawing a conceptual line between the practices of both groups. 666 understood this as a derogatory comment meant to undermine the value of 666’s chosen aesthetic that embraced the vernacular.

The following sections outlines the way other groups practices a kind of Street Fighter aesthetic as strategy for entering the art world and bringing new ideas, new regions, new built on their own vantage points into the discussion of global contemporary art.

All of these artist collectives represent activist practices – but only one, La Lleca, practices within the realm of the local contemporary art scene in Mexico, somewhere at in the overlap between art and activist circles.³¹⁷ Funded at first by donations from volunteer members, and later by two giants of National arts funders, Fundacion Jumex (the premier collector and exhibitor of contemporary art), then Conaculta and Fonca (the National Council and Fund for Culture and Art), La Lleca is an example of radical, critical pedagogy used as a performative art. Like other Street Fighter groups, they recruited members and proceletised about social change and the need for action with an attitude akin to the religious zeal of missionaries.

The critical artwork of Street Fighter groups marries social activism and art through the passionate delivery of activist strategies, almost at the level of religious furor. The

³¹⁷ I documented the convergence of these two scenes in 2010 field notes: “It’s a rainy Tuesday in Mexico City, and La Lleca has organized a meeting to think, plan & network with other and groups who operate in the cross-section of art and activism. They’ve invited Iconoclasistas, a group from Buenos Aires who does collective mapping graphic activism in cities around the world, to meet other Mexico City collectives and lead a collective mapping exercise. The result is a map of images and text describing the local and national artwork and art actions of activist groups -- Sublevarte, Naranjas de Hiroshima, Fuentes Rojas, Nati del FPDS (Buenos Aires) and Guille de Arte por Libertad (Rosario). The map recounts events that have taken place from the 1990s to present: marches, performance workshops in jails, protest murals, dispersing of phamphlets and posters against the drug war, workshops for educators on how to teach a critique of the patriarchial order... [Figure 18] There’s a red Zapatista sign on the wall. Anarchist and political stencils on the floors and walls, products past workshops and creative meetings. Metal stairs leading to a library upstairs and below a space to meet. Café de la olla brews in an extra large carafe. And there’s freshly printed posters drying on the racks. A white-mustached man cleans brushes and tools from the days workshops. Iseo Noyola has worked here for years, a space he describes as “un proyecto educativo de cultura popular que la gente a traves del recurso tecnico de la grafica pueda vincularse y organizarse para generar una construccion de un México mejor.” [“a working class cultural and educational project that uses the graphic arts to connect and organize with the goal of building a better Mexico” (author’s translation)]”

participants they engaged often became artists – bringing them into the fold. Many of the non-artists they engaged in these artworks had not ever before heard of contemporary art, or sound art, or the act of activism. But after sustained interactions with the Street Fighters, many became converts for this new kind of art and social activism. Some Street Fighters, like StereoTypo and 666ismo Critico, actually did not identify as artists at all – the creators of StereoTypo thought of themselves as graphic designers (by trade) and the founders of 666ismo identified as anarchists who worked with artists primarily because mostly art students were the only participants they could recruit to join and work with them on their cooperative projects that functioned around a pirate radio studio in the public university.

La Lleca was born through an idea to combat the criminalization of poverty through mutual care, love and live art. Images of arrests of organized crime, depicting criminals in hand cuffs are common in Mexico newspapers and global media featuring stories on Mexico. Like this image, they most often feature images of masculinity and working class and working poor dress, baggy jeans, sneakers and other clothing that is sold cheaply at open air markets. A group of activists and artists led by feminists Lorena Mendez Barrios and Fernando Fuentes in Mexico City are challenging the plethora of these images and their meaning with a project called La Lleca, a prison slang word for ‘the street’. They began working with incarcerated men in Mexico city jails in 2004 to make performance art that critiques both patriarchy and the criminalization of poverty. There is no audience outside of the jail – all performances take place inside, the only audience are the artists themselves, along with incarcerated women and men who learn performance through workshops with artists and activists from the outside, and together producing joint pieces. The group gained critical acclaim both in the city's penitentiaries and in the art world, eventually receiving funding from the Jumex Foundation based upon its aesthetic merit. Here critical pedagogy is both artistic medium and tool for social change.

Works like *Collective Marriage* (2006) investigate a combination of social themes and artistic forms. The group describes the work in a collective statement as a collective action in which the members “authorized the marriage and defined it for and amongst ourselves,” (Archivo Colectivo La Lleca, 2006). The action held different meanings: “For some, it was a “real” act created by the group. For others, it was an event that marked our friendship and/or a type of affective pact. For yet others, it was a first chance to get married under their own free will. For some of those that didn’t work directly with the actions group it was a game and for others just a joke.” (ibid.).

As this collective statement and artwork demonstrate, La Lleca creates work that is two-fold: on the one hand there is the planning educational workshops taking place in meetings outside the jail, on the other hand there is the collaborative workshops and performances within the jail working with the incarcerated members of the group. Inside and outside, La Lleca runs these two programs simultaneously, and both sides inform each other. Outside members also work with a therapist who guides their de-briefings. Aesthetics is important at times to the group, who discuss and present its work in Mexico City museums and activist galleries. But the particular aesthetic concerns of each individual artwork by the group sometimes takes a second seat to the conceptual image-making, “a critique of how the media constructs an image or narrative on delinquency and crisis”. In conversation last Spring, Fernando told me that La Lleca had been greatly influenced by collective projects like the Zapatista uprising from the nineties, and arts and activist collectives from Argentina, perhaps like Tucuman Arde, whom Enwezor credits with raising “very important questions concerning the entire relationship of art to the public sphere shift[ing] the emphasis from dematerialization to the production of social space....”

Some jail directors have praised La Lleca, asserting that the jail environment often becomes less violent after La Lleca has established a presence there. Other directors have thrown the group out of the jail on accusations that their work disrupts the power structure of the prison, although La Lleca has always succeeded in re-gaining access.

From 2006 to the present La Lleca has expanded the number of prisons it works in, starting first with a men's prison, and now working as well in a women's prison and juvenile delinquent center.

A third group for whom socio-economic class is an underlying issue can be found in La Lleca, who's group treats the subject in an entirely different manner, with solutions and concerns that seem to dialogue with the concerns of StereoTypo of Beirut and 666ismo Critico of Mexico City, yet adding a new element to the conversation. Helena Chavez MacGregor describes this group as one that operates with "un objetivo pedagogico, si no le decimos artistico como muy concreto. Unlike many of other groups in their city, Chavez MacGregor sees La Lleca as one of the few that "si tienen una vision de que quieren lograr como proyecto colectivo."

Mexican art historian Monica Mayer has written about the group since it's beginning. As a feminist artist and historian who came of age in the 1970s, Mayer says it would never have occurred to her to create feminist artwork in collaboration with men in public jails. Yet she also questions their work as possibly falling into what she calls an "evangelist" model for collective socially engaged practice: "A lot of these practices of (artist) groups going to work in communities that are quote unquote "oppressed," or with someone that needs help in some way, I keep questioning this kind of work." (Conversation with author, 2012).³¹⁸

La Lleca's work could be considered activist art – a kind of art Bishop discredits for being "politically correct," "predictable," and even "Christian" in that the artist sacrifices their own desires and goals of aesthetics for the benefit of the participants, giving up complete control of the work by allowing the "ordinary citizens" to have a say in the

³¹⁸ Mayer continues, "I know that when its a long term project they end up becoming part of the community, and the level of commitment changes, although this is not the norm here. I've seen lots of work that could be called evangelizing or existentialist but out of all of these I've never seen one that proposes to work for example with the wealthy Mexican bankers, or with the wealthy and powerful – except Daniela Rossell [who photographed] rich and famous Mexican youth, although she wasn't going into a different community to do this, she was visually representing her own community." (ibid)

outcome and process. While this resonates to some extent with Mayer's evangelist model at work in social practice, it would be difficult to categorize La Lleca's work as 'predictable' or lacking in "aesthetic" value. They started within a teacher/student, privileged/oppressed framework of pedagogy, yet over the years evolved to include members who joined while in jail and then continued performing and planning with the group after being released. They have withstood the test of time, proving to be of merit in both the art scene and the Mexico City penal system. Bishop has criticized Western collective projects that provide social services in an era when neo-liberalist governments are cutting social funding, since to her they are merely providing a band-aid or distraction for a greater problem. But La Lleca's kind of social project is different in the context of Mexico, where funding for arts programming in jails has never been plentiful. Perhaps in this case, La Lleca actually does provide a new model for social and political organisation, a task Bishop says artists are not always "best equipped to undertake".

The three Street Fighter types of groups I interviewed practiced a kind of unspoken missionary ethic in which religion was replaced by art. La Lleca, like Mayer describes, beared an uncanny resemblance to evangelists carrying out good will missions in crisis zones not native to their members or system of religion. 666ismo Crítico used a kind anti-church model of anarchy and system-bucking insouciance. Each of these groups were directed and founded by a charismatic leader and centred their activities in sites of crisis – city jails, downtown ruins still under the threat of car bombs and low flying fighter jets, and the heart of a protest radio transmission that turned into a pirate radio station. Like missionaries for the church of art, each group created introductory opportunities for non-artists to experience and create critical artwork (in the form of classes, workshops, interactive fonts for art-making), followed by longer term opportunities for these participants to join the group as cooperative members and convert to a faith in the power of activism through art to change lives and fix social problems.

Aesthetic Resistance

Across these four diverse scenes, regardless of age, context, mission or duration of the group, there were two consistent practices of what can be referred to as aesthetic resistance: a desire for systemic change in both the art world and city politic.

White Cuber resistance focused on expanding the global art world's panoramic view to include previously ignored areas of the South, maintaining authority over the gaze while expressing it in the Eurocentric aesthetic framework of the modernist white cube, as 98weeks did by rendering visible feminism's research in the discourse of so-called Arab contemporary art and the global art world.

Urban Vernacular resistance centred around expanding the hegemonic white cube to include other aesthetics and art spaces outside the gallery, as los Urbanos did by successfully bringing working class aesthetics and cityscapes into the elite world of the white cube gallery, through collectively supporting their leading artist and transforming his work into a rocket-ship that would launch their collective vision into the highest zones of market and cultural value. Much of the Urban Vernaculars' time was dedicated to fighting the boundaries assigned to them because of their geographic position in the periphery. The imaginary line of domination drawn between South and North limits all artists and citizens alike of Southern countries: they cannot freely travel to almost any country, a birthright bestowed upon Northern citizens as a right that comes with their national passport. This is an especially significant line for artists of the South, because one of the commonly accepted beliefs in the 21st century art world is that to become an artist, one must travel and complete residencies abroad. This is considered by many artists in this study as an absolute necessity for becoming an internationally-known artist and a tennet for intellectual thought. To deny an artist the right to travel is to deny them the right to fully develop an artistic language that can critique, participate, or even subvert the global dialogue of contemporary art. So artists from the South must find other means of crossing the boundaries imposed upon them. White Cuber artists

tended to use economic capital and their actual passports to cross the border into the North, rather than cultural passports -- they were either born abroad in the North, or had the connections or economic capital to secure costly visas and pay high cost of living and high university tuition in Europe and North America. But Southern artists without economic resources or connections to Europe or North America needed to find other means to become an internationally known artist. Renacho Melgar and the other Urbanos did this by travelling to countries like Peru, Cuba, Costa Rica, and Guatemala, where they could afford price of living, get visas and use Spanish-speaking networks to find galleries, residences and cultural exchanges. One time finding themselves without a place or funds to stay in another country, they slept huddled together under their canvases in a public park. Among his peers, Melgar was the only exhibiting artist who had not won any prestigious awards and had not travelled to any Northern countries for education, residencies or to show artwork (in the CCESV show *Esto No es Una Degeneración: ¿Arte Joven en El Salvador?*) Out of the 31 exhibiting artists, Melgar was one of seven artist who had not travelled or exhibited in any Northern countries; the vast majority of their peers who were exhibiting in the white cube gallery space had credentials that spanned both Latin America and Europe or the USA. The Urbanos experience of becoming an international artist was extremely different than middle class artists from the South who used their Northern experiences to become international artists – a fact ignored by a Euro-centric art-institution that largely filters out Southern artists who do not come from affluent backgrounds. This invisible line of boundaries between North and South represents a second filter applied to the art scene of each country – the majority of those who become internationally known are those with the resources and socio-economic privilege (often linked to cultural privilege). In other Souths, this kind of filter that privileges artists who interact with European styles and art centres, also functioned through the apparatus of the state. In her masters thesis on the Cairo art scene, Alexandra Shindler, a student at the American University in Cairo, describes this kind of filter acting through the Young Artists Salon (called Salon al-Shabab), a state-run cultural institution funded

by the state and foreign entities, that started in 1989 in Cairo. According to evidence provided by SHindler, it is both “a much anticipated [and widely discussed] event for Egyptian youth hoping to establish careers as artists” and criticized most commonly for “its tendency to favor artists who have studied in Europe and whose art reflects this artistic background.” (Shindler 2012, 10).³¹⁹

Whether through spider-like private organisations like Townhouse Gallery or the filters of public institutions like the Youth Salon in Egypt, or the filter of the competitions and exhibitions at the Spanish Cultural Centre in San Salvador, all of these work as devices for rendering a kind of correct, authentic notion of a definition of contemporary art from every South. These state, private and ngo supported filters could fit the definition of what Jacques Rancière calls “aesthetic illusion” or “a device which merely serves to mask the reality that aesthetic judgement is structured by class domination”. (Rancière 2008, 133).

Contrastingly, Street fighter resistance was far less concerned with expanding the content or audience for contemporary art. This is not to say that they did not participate in state or private contemporary art exhibition spaces or competitions. They sometimes allowed their work to be shown in white cube spaces as spectacle for a removed audience, primarily as a means of gaining funding or gaining new audience converts through widened exposure, but their primary goal was to create the conditions for a non-artist audience to engage in, and eventually create, politically-charged art as a form of resistance. While they were interested in the recognition and promotion that contemporary art venues and funders could offer

³¹⁹ “The Salon has become a much anticipated event for Egyptian youth hoping to establish careers as artists, and is widely discussed every year with that community. The Salon is most often criticized for its tendency to favor artists who have studied in Europe and whose art reflects this artistic background. To many artists whose art does not reflect the style of European contemporary art, this trend in the judges’ decisions is very significant. They felt that it is a judgement on the artistic “value” of the art that many feel is unfair to artists who do not have the opportunity to travel to Europe. Others express frustration that the art that is more “authentically Egyptian” is not being represented or encouraged (see Winegar, 2006). The Salon, for many artists, determines the expectations and demands around notions of authenticity and “Egyptian-ness.” (Shindler 2012, 10)

them, Street Fighters primarily interested in the possible function of art as a structure to promote radical change in the social imaginary, or at least to create small acts that countered hegemonic logic. They were not interested in the careerist kind of strategies of White Cubers or Urban Vernaculars who sought to earn a living from a career in the art world. The majority of Street Fighters earned their living primarily through other means, primarily through middle class professions such as professors, teachers, graphic designers. While their artistic practice sometimes helped them earn money as a side project or as curriculum building cultural capital, they did not view art as their primary career or means of earning a living. This is an important point because it allowed them the freedom to not have to rely upon the Northern art-institution for validation or recognition, and thus were able to circumvent the mechanisms of the spider or filter, devices used by Northern art entities to exert control over Southern contemporary art scenes.

The strategies and methodology of both Vernaculars and White Cubers could be described using a theory popular in 21st century Latin American art criticism: they can be read as ‘minor’ expressions in the ‘major’ hegemonic system of the Eurocentric global art world.³²⁰ Urban Vernaculars and White Cubers bring new content, gazes, and perspectives to the global art world. But Street fighters, unlike Vernaculars and White-cubers, use a different mode based upon action and participation rather than spectacle. While White-cubers and Urban-vernaculars use mimesis and parody to comment critically upon the political spaces of both the local social world and the international art world, Street fighters recompose the edifices, roles and narratives that make up these spaces.

In a similar way that Deleuze and Guattari classify Kafka’s ‘minor literature’ as necessarily political in the context of a larger hegemonic social imaginary, the artwork

³²⁰ This is an idea translated from Deleuze and Guattari’s reading of Kafka as creating a third space in his literature, that is between the minority Jewish culture of Prague and the dominant German and Austrian-Hungarian power structure that represents the majoritarian identity. Deleuze and Guattari read Kafka’s ‘minor’ literature as an expression that can contest and subvert the major literature of the dominant culture.

and actions of all three types of groups can be considered political. They propose art works and art actions that intervene into the localized space of the social imaginary in their respective cities, a social realm Charles Taylor describes as comprised of a set of expectations and codes that prescribe social norms, existing in the zone of a society's "images, stories and legends" (Taylor 2002, 106). For Canadian philosopher Taylor, the social imaginary constitutes the familiar or the common, and a communal way of understanding processes, acts, events and norms. It is not an underlying set of beliefs, but a structure that enables a common understanding of what is, or what ought to be familiar. Anything outside this realm then becomes the unfamiliar, or the odd. The notion of "what ought to be considered familiar" or unfamiliar" in any given society is exactly the crossroads where all of the artist groups studied in this thesis coincide; the point where all of them seek to intervene, albeit in different realms and from differing vantage points. Each type desires to intervene in the social imaginary by problematizing what is considered familiar. White-cubers critique the commonly-practiced elitism of the global art world by populating the white cube gallery with the unfamiliar content and theory from the South. Urban-vernaculars critique the ubiquitous use and conceptualization of the white cube and other normative Eurocentric aesthetics by bringing them into conversation with local aesthetics. Street fighters critique larger socially accepted norms (like the criminalization of poverty, the stereotyping and defamation of character of Arab identity in mass media, or the limiting of art theory to the ivory tower) by getting non-artist to participate in performative acts of resistance, and by getting the larger art world to pay attention to these acts.

The French political philosopher Jacques Rancière proposes two politics of aesthetics that are particularly relevant to the role artist groups play in these three strategic types. By his reading, the common concept of aesthetics should not be understood as its own discipline, but instead as "a particular way in which, in a given historical or social context, art is identified as art" (Berrebi 2008). Following this definition, Rancière describes a kind of spectrum of aesthetic politics in which there are two opposing poles – on one side is the extreme of art that is sometimes undistinguishable from the sensory

experience of everyday life -- “becoming life of art,” a situation in which art merges with other kinds of activities, experiences and ways of being in life. On the other side of the spectrum is the politics of a resistant form of art that is “derived from the separation of art from other forms of activity and its resistance to any transformation into a form of life.” (Berrebi 2008). In between these two extremes is where Rancière situates the critical art of the 1960s – like the practices of los Grupos in Mexico. For Rancière, 1960s critical art was not about finding a space between art and politics, but instead searching for an art form that was located in the tension of these two polar extremes of the politics of aesthetics, one that “oscillates between legibility and illegibility, everydayness and ‘radical strangeness’” (Rancière quoted in Berrebi 2008).

Rancière defines critical art through what he sees as it’s possibility to provoke intellectual awareness.³²¹ But there is no one way for art to “provoke awareness of political situations” and no one way for the audience of art’s spectacle to move from consciousness-raising to socio-political action (to borrow a concept from Paulo Freire’s critical pedagogy). Rancière states, “There is no straight way from looking at a spectacle to understanding the state of the world, no straight way from intellectual awareness to political action.” (Rancière 2008, 12). This pathway from knowledge to action is perhaps more the concern of the Street-finder kind of collectivism than the two other types. The Street Fighters groups problematise even the idea of ‘minor’ and ‘major’ expressions by intending to re-wire the system all together. Rancière theorises the role of politically charged or critical art as being able to awaken audiences to new political sensibilities, making them aware of previously invisible issues of social inequality and perhaps even mobilizing them into political actions. But furthering this idea, the Street fighters place their audiences directly in the process of political art-making, engaging them in the production process.

³²¹ Critical art plugs the gap by defining a straight relation between its aims and its means: its ends would be to provoke an awareness of political situations leading to political mobilization. Its means would be to produce a sensory form of strangeness, a clash of heterogeneous elements prompting a change in perception. (Rancière 2008, 11)

In “The aesthetic revolution and its outcomes” (2008), Rancière explores the way several case studies of contemporary art exhibitions in Europe and North America in the year 2000 operate between the tension of art as art and art blurred with the sensory experience of life, delineating how these artistic proposals at the beginning of the 21st century differ from the direct proposal of critical art of the 1960s, which adopted a more straight-forward approach to political art. Rancière proposes that critical art of the 2000s is fundamentally different from the straight forward critical art of the 1960s (which blurred the boundaries between radical strangeness and the familiarity of everyday ordinariness, between the legible and the unreadable, unwritable). To illustrate this, he proposes four categories, or strategies of 21st century contemporary artwork that operates between his two poles of aesthetic politics: play, archive, encounter and mystery. Rancière uses four examples of European contemporary art from the year 2000 to illustrate these as schematic concepts - but what meaning, if any, do these strategies hold for art from the global South? These categories, some more than others, do in fact, have some currency for artist groups working in the four cities of the global South of this thesis (though they do not suffice to completely describe all strategies from these so-called peripheries, a common misuse of European art theory). Under the category of ‘play’ he describes the strategy some politicized contemporary art employs by using strategies of “derision or double entendre”; in the category of the archive, “the artist becomes a collector and archivist who in so doing, models her behavior on practices of daily life and brings them together as art.” In his concept of the encounter, Rancière “essentially repeats Bourriard’s idea of relational aesthetics: art is there to bring social links between people where these have disappeared in modern society.” Mystery, the fourth category, is something Rancière describes through the case of Jean-Luc Godard’s kind of montage, that “brings together heterogeneous elements to emphasise their proximity rather than differences, constituting what Godard calls a ‘fraternity of metaphors’” (Berrebi 2008). But how do these relate to zones and strategies of Urban-vernaculars, Street fighters and White-cubers?

Counter-narratives

In addition to the desire for systemic change, a second finding in the artwork and organizing of all artist groups was that each one produced creative expressions of resistance to media stereotypes about each region, and to the idea that art must be read as a national representation.

In 1990, a year in which many of the artist members of the groups in this case study were coming of age as art students, theorist Stuart Hall proposed that “all identities are constituted within representation,” (McCaughan, 57). This assertion lends meaning to the element that all of these groups have in common: an interest in producing counter-representations to those inscribed over and over in mass media and an urgent need to interrupt the means of communication that produce these tropes. Across the board, there was an evident desire in the artworks and actions of each group to counter the idea of art from the global South as necessarily a national representation. This was a counter-act to the idea of the identity exhibition, which assumes that art can be a national or regional representation, and even to the geographic turn in global contemporary art, which operates on an underlying premise that art from every country outside the North should, or even could serve as a textbook on cultural authenticity.

Each and every group engaged in the production of an alternative representation of the city, which can be considered small or ‘minor’ narratives in direct juxtaposition to the large narrative or tropes that circulate more often in mainstream, international media (and sometime in local or national media as well). The groups produced these alternative representations by introducing an alternative lens – a different way of seeing the issue behind a large narrative -- by engaging primarily with a non-art public and presenting them with a way to see this issue through the lens of critical art.

These artworks provide alternative narratives about what it is like to live and work in the global South by challenging popular and art world stereotypes about this place depicted as a crisis zone of creative, and exploitable precarity. Alternative narratives on city, culture and region are presented by artist groups as interventions into the larger system of image circulation, still dominated by global media. From the White Cubers de-politicised aesthetic to the Street Fighter ideology of combat zone, every single one of these groups showed signs of employing a conceptual kind of circuit bending, or intervening in the established circuits and systems of the official worlds they inhabited (art world, social world, regional/cultural world). This concept is borrowed from a new media arts methodology known as circuit bending, a methodology that interrupts the established circuits or systems of aesthetics, described by Hertz and Parikka (2015).³²²

Circuit-bending is actual art practice, but also a metaphor for a certain kind of contemporary art practice that takes place among urban ruins, finding poetry in the decay of modernity.³²³ The importance of the circuit as a metaphor for contemporary art history is foundational to understanding both how artist groups relate to the ecology of their worlds (for example, as described by Maamoun at the beginning of this chapter) and for insight into the way many of these groups are reconfiguring the way we see both art and its histories.

³²² “The process of circuit bending typically involves going to a second-hand store or garage sale to obtain an inexpensive battery-powered device, taking the back cover of the device off and probing the mechanism’s circuit board. The tinkerer uses a “jumper” wire to connect any two points on the circuit board and thus temporarily short-circuits and rewires the device. The battery-powered device is powered on during this process, and the individual listens for unusual sound effects that result from probing. If an interesting result is found, the connections are marked for modification. It is possible to insert switches, buttons or other devices between these points to enable or disable the effect.” (Hertz and Parikka 425)

³²³ “Despite planned obsolescence, the probing, exploring and manipulating of consumer electronics outside of their standard lifespan is a key tactic in the contemporary art practice. Reuse of consumer commodities emerged within various art methods of the early avant-garde in the early 20th century, from Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque’s work with found newspapers in 1912 to Marcel Duchamp’s Bicycle Wheel of 1913 or his inverted Bedfordshire Urinal Fountain in 1917.” (Hertz and Parikka 2015, 426)

Considering the work of 21st century artist groups as based in a fundamental desire to re-wire the system that they mirror, the metaphor of circuit bending lends a timely juxtaposition to the way these groups have previously been categorized by history and the geographic turn. “The circuit, not the past, is where media archaeology starts if we want to develop a more concrete design-oriented version of how we can think about recycling and remediation as art methods,” (p. 427) The authors are speaking of looking into the physical object as a place from which to extract an archive, a history, rather than following the linear narrative of text-based history. This methodology is also being applied to text-based and exhibition-based history, as Miguel Angel López proposes with the idea that art history be queered rather than colored in (i.e. queered in the sense that its categories and systems be questioned instead of following the Euro-centric anthropological model that seeks to replicate European art history by finding examples of it being repeated and reified all over the world). In both notions of circuit bending and queer mapping as new ideologies for art history, “what gets bent is not only the false image of linear history but also the circuits and archive that form the contemporary media [or art] landscape.” (p. 427). This comparison of new ways of seeing Latin American art with new ways of seeing contemporary media art is one Maria Fernández made in 2000 when she found a parallel in post-colonial studies and media studies. Both, according to Fernández, were about territory, the body, intersectionality and a critique of Eurocentrism.

The strategies of creating new centers and zones outside the institution and unregulated by the machinery of the state, are all ways of performing an ideology of new technologies of information. In other words, a shared methodology behind some of the most socially-engaged collective practices in cities of the global South of the 21st century is a re-thinking and re-ordering of the technologies used to disseminate the information that is used to construct the identity of citizens – both global and local. In this era, people constitute their identities by both the connections that tie them together and the counter-connections that draw dividing

lines in the terrain of the city. This is the IT-condition we live in that these authors write of, a condition mirrored in the artist group as social unit of analysis, a collective entity whose formation mimics the act of constituting a system (circuit) and interrupting it, re-constituting the system to alter its function and production.

Conclusion

At the end of Tragic Utopias

Where do we go next at the end of the illusion of centre and periphery, the end of the end of modernism, the end of art history and theory as it was once configured in colonial times... at the end tragedy and utopia?

Gerardo Mosquera uses the phrase ‘tragic utopia’ to describe the art theorising and writing about Latin American art in the anthology *Beyond the Fantastic*: “The authors included in this book are products of this process [the process of creating, using, and then abandoning a 1960s counter-paradigm for Latin American art through a social theory], but they reposition it in accordance with the demands of a new period and within the framework of a critique of modernity and of the end of a tragic utopia,”. He is alluding to several failed attempts: Marta Traba’s call to theorise/valorise an aesthetic of Latin American art and the ensuing failure of a Latin Americanist social theory of art, and the monster of magical realism that became a primitivist stereotype instead of a home-grown theory of the South, (used to limit rather than valorise Latin American art) and the failure of the utopic concept of Latin America as a place.

It would seem that in 2015, art from the global South now occupies a paradoxical position at both centre and periphery of the global art world. The 56th Venice Biennial, led by Okwui Enwezor, the renowned post-colonial curator and self-appointed curator of elsewhere, named this edition of the biennial *All the World’s Futures*, signalling a multiplicity of futures in the story of global capital with artworks that primarily address social and political themes. This radical change evident even in the content of the old canonical institutions like the Venice Biennial or Christie’s Auction house, which now bring in some of the highest prices and most renowned praise for artworks from Latin America and the Arab world, indicates that these two regions have undoubtedly become protagonists in this phenomenon of inverting the map.

Yet, as the curatorial voices from (and on) the South strengthen in prominance and number, at the same time, curators and arts writers from the South continue the tradition of relying upon European theorists to explain the meaning of aesthetics from the South, particularly in relationship to the social and the political.

This canon of European theorists³²⁴ reified as a kind of currency in contemporary art writing and curating includes: Foucault, Benjamin, Bourriaud, and most recently, with the influx of media-narratives on the South as a contested political terrain, Jacques Ranciere on the relationship between the political and the aesthetic.³²⁵ Now, more than ever, with the turn to the political possibilities of art from the South (in the context of revolution, crisis, war and violence) artists, writers, and theorists from the South are faced with the question of the role of the political in aesthetics. After 2011, in both regions, there is a noticeable trend in using Rancière's writings on the aesthetics of resistance to understand the answers to this question (evidenced in the work of many of those featured in this thesis).³²⁶

What is lost and what is gained when writers, artists, and curators from the South continue to reify the European cannon of male theorists, using the lens of Eurocentrism to understand the contemporary South (even as the South is gaining screen-time in the gaze

³²⁴ I am referring here to the canon of white male European thinkers who are based in Europe, not the mirror cannon of white male European thinkers who are based in Latin America, and part of the European diaspora (e.g. Mignolo, Dussel, Garcia Canclini, Galeano, etc).

³²⁵ Some of the writers whose ideas are examined as key texts in this thesis who have spotlighted Rancierian thought as a main way to explain the relationship between aesthetics and art in the South include: Helena Chavez-MacGregor (2013) writing her thesis on using Ranciere to "rethink the notion of subjectivation as an aesthetic process and investigate how artistic practices and social movements work on that process" (2013), Tamara Bringas (2016) writing about and curating art from Central America, and Jessica Winegar (2016) writing about art from Egypt after the Arab Spring. Gabriela Rangel quoted Ranciere's 2007 statement "Depoliticizing is perhaps political art's most ancient function," in her introduction to the Simposium of International Contemporary Art Theory in Mexico City (Rangel 2009). Ranciere is also used in theoretical analysis by Anthony Downey, Dina Matar, Nermin Saybasili and Hamzamolnar Curatorial Collective in Downey's 2014 anthology *Common Grounds: New Media and Critical Practices in North Africa and the Middle East*. Members of artist groups also mentioned Ranciere in informal conversations, which tended to happen after the revolutions began in the Arab world (in formal interviews they discussed the other canonical theorists mentioned above).

of global contemporary art)? What does the field stand to gain from continuing to rely upon a canon of Northern European thinkers as the pillars of global contemporary art theory (reading Rancière as the continuation of the European theorist canon, also including Derrida, Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari, which is still commonly relied upon in contemporary art text to explain art from the South)?

Perhaps some answers can be found in returning to the question I posed near the end of the last chapter: What meaning do 21st century categories/strategies of Western European art hold for art strategies and methodologies from the global South, like Rancière's schematic sets of play, encounter, archive and mystery? The scenes of play, encounter, archive, and mystery seem to be applicable descriptors for scenarios across types and genres of artist groups: Salvadoran collective Artificio and Mexican Rotatorio often described a 'ludico' or ludic essence in their artwork; La lleca played house with prisoners, so to speak, Medrar's aesthetic brought a playful critical look into serious politics through blurring the division between video and documentary art.

Perhaps these scenarios of play, encounter, the archive and mystery are only truly useful in a global context if we open them up, build upon them, invert them, subvert them, queer them by putting these categories into dialogue with strategies of art-making from the South (strategies like the ones explored in throughout this thesis, from 1900 to the present). The Beirut school of contemporary artists like Akram Zaatari and Walid Raad, who have demonstrated through their conceptual artworks the failibility of a system of national memory as testimony and of an art history system that asks artists from the South to be read as national signifiers, is a great example. This idea of the periphery recomposing the systems and circuits of the North has particular resonance today with the popularity of new narratives and theories from artworks and art actions made in the South.

The mixing or *mestizaje* of Northern and Southern theories, methodologies, aesthetics and strategies also hints at a new direction for the third hybrid space once theorised by

post-colonial teachers like Homi Bhaba. Canclini imagines this space as a place for reconversion: “cultural reconversions, in addition to being strategies for social mobility, or for following the movement from the traditional to the modern, are hybrid transformations generated by the horizontal coexistence of a number of symbolic systems... High, popular, and mass art nourish each other reciprocally.” (García Canclini 1992). This shares some similarity to Enwezor’s Tokunbo aesthetic: ““the spectacle and excess of Tokunbo culture, [borrowing Yoruban slang for a secondhand market], whereby discarded and semi-functional technological objects and detritus of the West are recalibrated for the African market.” (Enwezor 2007, 246) These two aesthetics respond to contexts of the global South that are immersed in an immense variety of aesthetic languages and traditions, from ancient to modern – a diversity of vernacular aesthetics that is not present in many Northern centres in the empty, remodeled blank slate of modernist design and structure. Artists working individually and collectively in the four capital cities discussed in this thesis live and work amongst visual languages from both the North and South, and from many different time periods and subcultures. They co-exist with the color scheme and design of contemporary indigenous cultures, for example, and with the ruins of past indigenous legacies. This close proximity to a diverse present and a diverse past makes it possible for artists in these capital cities to occupy these spaces in ways nearly impossible to do in other sites. Groups like Studio Emad Eddin, 98 weeks, the Jadmur Collective, la Fabri-K, inhabit modern and ancient ruins with their collective projects, while others like 666ismo Critico, Artificio, and the New Media Workshop at Helwan University in Cairo occupy the schools of modernism with educational school-in-school models. From these vantage points, they use artworks and art actions as spaces from which to signal or even recompose social inequalities, as *Art et Liberté* attempted in 1930s Cairo, and *La Lleca* or *StereoTypo* does today in the global South of the 2000s. These are all alternatives to the formulaic predetermination of concepts like multiculturalism or historical stereotypes, and it is from these vantage points that artists working collectively provide institutional critiques of both local and global art institutions through the informal infrastructures of artist-run spaces and projects that have taken place from the beginning of the independence from colonialism.

To Rancière's four categories we could add a fifth that describes the action of room service. When a worker (or in older days, a servant), brings an object like food or drink into the room of a guest (or king) they are performing an act of service, but also an act of intervention, introducing a new object into a previously curated space. Usually this is an action brought into being by means of a request or command, and it is related to some kind of exchange. But unsolicited room service subverts this performance by introducing an unsolicited, even dangerous object like a weapon, or poisoned food, or even a poisoned idea. In this thesis there are several examples of this phenomenon inbedded in a critical art work, in which the artist brings violence to the table of privilege, introducing it into the anesthetic zone of the white cube. Teresa Margolles did this at the Venice Biennial with *What Else Could We Talk About?*, bringing death, dead matter, and the burnt bodies of children killed in the drug wars to the wealthy art party scene of Venice. Tania Bruguera has done this by offering The curators of Ahmed Bassiony's posthumous exhibition in Venice brought the image of the martyr to the national representation of the Cairene pavilion. Salvadoran artists from Adobe, Tripode, la Fabri-K and other groups did this by subverting the white cube and using the aesthetic language of white on white to signify white with the development of many artworks that use this to reference the never-ending state violence that continues as a part of daily life even in a post war condition. The cooperative 666ismo Critico uses even the instrument of their name to bring violence to the front of the discussion, asking their collaborators and viewers to confront the institutional violence present in all modern structures of thought, art, and being.

These are not acts of violence against an intended audience and intended sphere through mimesis or parody, but rather they are an act of inversion through turning the concept of a curated, clean space into one of contamination. In the case of artworks like those of Teresa Margolles or the theoretical text of Sayak Valencia, it is an act of reverse-alchemy, because it re-introduces the violence of the old Colonial and new Capitalist

system back into the North, instead of leaving it to define the banished regions of the South.

The performative acts of strategies like reconversion, room service, collective social art, occupying ruins and old institutions with new projects, linked from across four urban sites in the South are all linked to a preoccupation with the combination of social issues with art issues within artist groups, creating a proposal of citizenship-building through cities as counter-zones opposed to national-state patriotism and citizenship. In the cases of artist groups and individual practices from the South, the act of becoming a critical artist is paralleled to the act of becoming a critical citizen who is civically minded and active.

And this (the incorporation of the new European theory cannon into a blend of global art theory about the South) is all well and good if no critical reading is really required, if simulacra is an accepted trade - or condition - for the South's inclusion into the contemporary global art system, and no loss is too great for the gain of the spotlight (for however short a period). But instead, if the goal is to critically understand the question of what is lost and what is gained from continuing to rely upon the European theoretical cannon to understand art from the global South, we can trace two main strategies used by thinkers of the South to understand the relationship of art to the region. These two strategies have been traced in this thesis through close readings of historical texts, theoretical texts, artworks, exhibitions, art critiques, interviews, oral histories, and ethnographic observations. At times these two strategies have been used in combination, sometimes they have been employed alternatively (like in the Havana Biennial) but they are always opposing. The first, more common strategy, looks North for validation, and seeks not to upset the circuits, system, and infrastructure of the North but rather to incorporate itself into the model and its interpellating reproduction across the globe.³²⁷

³²⁷ The conceptualization of these two strategies is inspired both by Quijano's understanding of the colonial system and its transfer into capitalism (from coloniality to Americanness), and López's taxonomy of art exhibitions.

An example of this first theory would be to go to great lengths to make the theories of Ranciere, founded in a European experience of 1968, seem relevant and able to explain the deep theories and actions of artists from the South, as I have tested in the preceeding paragraphs. The second strategy, not yet fully realized, looks to theorists of the outsiders (Decolonial theory, Black theory, Queer theory, and what some have named the Souths in the North), and seeks to undo rather than to be included and risk interpellation. What is lost in this second strategy is the packaging of a product (in this case art and artists from the global South), and what is gained is agency and accuracy of the many, many visions, stories, and theories can be found in the South. This second strategy culled from second sight could be, or a second level of dual consciousness, in the desire to undoe the standardized narratives which are a form of violence, as Zaatari, Quijano and many others have demonstrated.³²⁸

This collection of historical mediations, musings on models of curatorial and exhibition histories, and methodologies and strategies regarding art from the South is a contribution and intervention into the space of the global South and it's world stage.

* * *

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³²⁸ Visual artist Kameelah Janan Rasheed describes the legacy of black theorists and artists like Aria Dean, Derek Walcott, Baldwin, and many others who have worked consistently to undoe the narratives prescribed to Blackness (Rasheed 2016).

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